

# PLUCK AND LUCK

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## THE GRAY HOUSE ON THE ROCK ; OR, THE GHOSTS OF BALLENTYNE HALL. *By JAS C. MERRITT.*



Joe turned suddenly, peering off into the darkness. As he did so, at one end of the room a sight burst upon him, which seemed to freeze the very marrow of his bones.



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# The Gray House on the Rock;

OR,

## The Ghosts of Ballentyne Hall.

By JAS. C. MERRITT.

### CHAPTER I.

#### JOE BARKLEY'S ORDERS—A TRIFLING MISTAKE.

December 10, 1864. It is almost forty years ago since the strange events which we are about to disclose to the world now for the first time took place.

Shortly after three o'clock in the afternoon of the day above mentioned a young man plainly but comfortably dressed ascended the steps of one of those old mansions on Broadway, opposite the Bowling Green, in the city of New York.

He paid no attention to the soldier who stood at the entrance, but pushing by him into the hall, ascended the stairs—they were of solid mahogany—and knocked twice in a peculiar manner upon one of the chamber doors.

Then, as now, these mansions opposite the Bowling Green had ceased to be the residences of the old New Yorkers who owned them, but had been given over to other and more profitable uses.

Let us follow the young man into the upper chamber of the particular mansion in question, and seek to learn the nature of the business to which the old house had been applied.

In immediate response to the peculiar double knock the door was opened an inch or two—being secured in that position by a chain on the inside—and a man in the blue uniform of the United States army appeared in the breach.

"What's wanted?"

"To see Lieutenant Marsden."

"Your business?"

"You are a newcomer here, my friend. My call upon Lieutenant Marsden is by appointment. Say to him that Joe Barkley is without."

The door closed instantly, and a heavy bolt was heard to move into position on the inside.

Meanwhile the young man standing in the hall impatiently paced up and down.

"Confound these fellows! they change the guard here every day," he muttered. "To be sure, this is the office of the Government Secret Service, and close watching is necessary, but

one would think they might retain a doorkeeper long enough to have him become acquainted with the regular detectives of the Secret Service force."

A detective—this young man a detective?

To look at his rosy, beardless face, his wavy brown hair, and keen gray eye, it would never be suspected for an instant that he was anything but a boy just from school.

That was Joe Barkley's peculiarity, and it stood him in good stead.

He looked the youth of seventeen, but his actual age was twenty-two.

In those days, when pluck and brains were in active demand, age went for nothing.

Young as he was, Joe Barkley had for more than two years been a Secret Service detective—one of the most successful, one may add, in the employ of Uncle Sam at that time.

Thus, the mere mention of his name had the desired effect upon Lieutenant Marsden, manager of the Secret Service Bureau at New York.

In less than two minutes the doorkeeper was back again, the bolt was withdrawn, the chain lowered, and Joe Barkley ushered into the presence of Lieutenant Marsden himself.

"Good-afternoon, Barkley. Prompt, as usual, I see. Keegan, be good enough to close the door."

So the private door of Lieutenant Marsden's own particular den, partitioned off from the main room, was immediately closed, and Joe Barkley and the Secret Service official found themselves alone.

"Smoke, Barkley?" asked the lieutenant, passing over a box of cigars.

"Thanks," taking one and lighting it. "You wished to see me, Mr. Marsden, at three o'clock."

"Correct," replied the lieutenant, lighting a cigar for himself. "I have received a communication from President Lincoln, Barkley, which intimately concerns yourself."

"Indeed!"

"It is an important and dangerous mission upon which the president proposes to send you, and he desires me to say that you are at liberty to decline if you choose."



"Did you ever know me to hesitate on account of prospective danger, Mr. Marsden?"

"Never, Barkley, never; but the President don't know you as well as I do. Now, listen. You are to start to-night for Harper's Ferry, Virginia. There you are to take the railroad, which has again commenced running through a portion of the Shenandoah Valley, as far as a little station in the very heart of the Blue Ridge, called Dugdale, if I am not mistaken"—here the lieutenant consulted some papers which he took from a drawer, adding—"yes, Dugdale, that is the name. At this point you will find a conveyance awaiting which will take you to a farmhouse some twenty miles distant, and within the enemy's lines, and you must so time your movements as to arrive at the station at night.

"At the farmhouse you will meet a certain person who has just come from Richmond with full particulars of the state of the besieged city; these you will receive, and returning to Washington, place them in the hands of President Lincoln with all possible speed."

Joe Barkley flipped the ashes from his cigar and laughed lightly.

"Just the kind of a job I like, Mr. Marsden," was all he said.

"Good. I told the President you were the man. Exercise every caution. If you succeed in securing this information and conveying it to Washington in safety, the fall of Richmond is certain within a month. Here are your instructions. Read them carefully. You will observe that neither the location of the farmhouse is given nor the name of the party whom you are to see. Dugdale station is just outside the Confederate lines, the farmhouse twenty miles inside. You will telegraph the message I am about to dictate to Dugdale, and upon your arrival simply inquire for Mr. Carsten's carriage. Of course you will go disguised."

"All right. Give me the message. I'll send it off at once."

Pushing a telegraph blank toward the young detective, Lieutenant Marsden read from a paper as follows, while Joe Barkley jotted down the words:

"To Sidney Peterson, Esq., Dugdale, Va.:

"Mr. Carsten will arrive at Dugdale on the evening train. Have conveyance in readiness on its arrival. X. Y. Z."

"You have nothing to do but to enter the carriage," added the lieutenant. "The driver will convey you to the farmhouse, where you will be met by a person who will instruct you as to the rest."

Having completed the writing, Joe Barkley rose to depart.

"You'll send that off the first thing?" asked the lieutenant.

"Certainly."

"How much money will you need?"

"I should think two hundred would be ample."

"Here it is. Now, then, Barkley, good luck to you, and good-by."

Two minutes later Joe Barkley found himself hurrying up Broadway to the nearest telegraph office to send his despatch.

As he descended the two steps leading down to the office—a basement—a tall, handsomely-dressed man of about the middle age brushed rudely past him, and jerking the door-knob from his hand, entered the office in advance of himself.

Though strongly tempted to knock the fellow down, Joe Barkley did not resent this piece of impertinence by so much as a word.

"It won't pay me to get into a quarrel which might delay me," he muttered. "I shall remember that fellow's face, though. It would give me particular pleasure to thrash him at some more auspicious time."

Meanwhile the man had pushed ahead to the operator's window and handed in a dispatch.

Joe followed, and handing in his own with the necessary money, took his departure at once.

Now, of course, Joe Barkley did not see the dispatch handed through the operator's window by the stranger.

Had he done so he would have been not a little startled to find that save for the names it was almost the counterpart of his own.

It was as follows:

"To John Kinnicutt, Dugdale, Virginia.—Colonel Walsingham will arrive at Dugdale on the evening train. Have conveyance in readiness on the arrival of the train.

"X. Y. Z."

It was a singular coincidence—so singular that Billy Edwards, the young telegraph operator, noticed it, seeing at once the necessity of care to avoid a mistake.

Now, care was something that Billy Edwards seldom exercised.

He was, in fact, carelessness itself.

At the time when the two messages were handed through his window Billy Edwards was engaged in an animated political discussion with a friend, admitted—contrary to all rules—behind his official rail.

As a result of this distraction of his attention the careless operator used the name Carsten in the Kinnicutt dispatch, and informed Sidney Peterson, Esq., that Colonel Walsingham would arrive at Dugdale by the evening train.

It was a trifling mistake.

Only a substitution of names.

The close of the year 1864 was a stirring time.

Upon trifles great undertakings hung.

The trifling mistake of this careless operator was destined to give rise to momentous happenings in the fortunes of several persons intimately connected with this tale.

## CHAPTER II.

### A NIGHT RIDE IN THE BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAINS—KATHERINE LIVINGSTON IN A DESPERATE FIX.

"Dugdale! Dugdale!"

The day express from Harper's Ferry drew up at a little station in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the conductor throwing open the door of the single passenger car, and announcing the name of the place as above.

It was nine o'clock, and the short December day had long ago closed in dark and lowering, every indication of an approaching storm.

At the announcement of the station three persons alighted from the train.

One was a young man dressed like an army officer off duty, with thick black hair, heavy mustache, and wearing a heavy cloak; the others a tall gentleman of about the middle age, and a young lady of great beauty, in years not over seventeen.

The army officer stepped first from the cars, and advanced along the platform surveying the wild mountain scene with an air of some curiosity.

To the right, and immediately behind the station, one of the peaks of the Blue Ridge Mountains towered above him; to the left was a rushing torrent flowing parallel with the railroad track, on the other side of which several horses—some attached to conveyances, others simply under saddle—



stood hitched to a horizontal bar nailed upon two wooden posts.

As the gentleman and lady stepped from the train a man came hurriedly across the little foot-bridge thrown over the torrent, and passing in front of the locomotive, was about to board the train.

In so doing it became necessary for him to pass before the middle-aged gentleman and his charge.

No sooner had his eyes rested upon them than he unceremoniously seized the former by the hand and drew him one side.

Meanwhile the young girl remained waiting.

Even in the dim light afforded by the station lantern the army officer, who stood watching her attentively, could distinguish a look of deep anxiety upon her face.

She seemed oppressed to a marked degree with the utter dreariness of the surrounding scene.

Indeed, such was the case, but it failed to account in full for the anxiety which at that moment filled the girl's heart.

She was listening.

Above the puff, puff of the locomotive a few words of the conversation between her companion and his unexpected acquaintance had reached her ears.

"Walsingham! You here! We expected another. So you have brought the girl?"

These were the words.

There were also others overheard by the listener a moment later on.

"Hem'ing will be in raptures. He expected——"

She heard no more.

Pressing her hand to her forehead, the girl reeled suddenly, and would have fallen had not the army officer sprang forward and caught her in his arms.

"My dear young lady, are you ill? Can I——"

"Stand aside, sir, and attend to your own business!" exclaimed a rough voice behind him. "Miss Livingston, I am ready. Let us go at once."

And, without deigning to glance at the discomfited officer, the middle-aged man drew the girl's arm within his own and hurried her, half fainting, across the foot-bridge to the other side of the stream.

"Colonel Walsingham's carriage!" he shouted. "Is it here?"

There were two vehicles before him.

Both were double-seated buggies, and each attended by a young negro as black as the clouds which scurried over the mountain tops.

Strangely enough, neither spoke in answer to the man's impatient demand, but both approached, making signs that they were deaf and dumb.

Each of the negroes held a slip of paper, which he presented to the inquirer.

Upon one slip was written: "This is Mr. Carsten's carriage," upon the other: "The bearer will drive Colonel Walsingham to his destination."

"A pair of dummies, by all that's good!" exclaimed the man. "Here, you black idiot," addressing the bearer of the latter slip, "you are the fellow we want."

Though the words were not heard, the man's manner was instantly comprehended.

The negro sprang toward the more respectable looking of the two conveyances and began to unhitch the horses.

"This is the carriage, is it?" muttered the man. "Well, it's ramshackle enough, dear knows. Come, Miss Livingston, let me help you in."

The young girl drew back, looking wildly about her.

The train had moved out of the station by this time—even the army officer was not to be seen.

"Colonel Walsingham! Where are you taking me?"

The words, spoken in low, impassioned tones, conveyed both doubt and fear.

"Where am I taking you? Why, to Ballentyne Hall, of course. Where else should I take you? Be quick—every moment is precious—even now your father may be dying for all we know."

"I—I am afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"I hardly know—I— Who was that man you talked with at the station?"

The man's eyes glittered ominously.

"So you were listening!" he said, in low, meaning tones. "Miss Livingston, you are laboring under some grave misunderstanding. Get into the carriage. I will explain as we ride along."

Grasping her arm, he forced rather than assisted his fair charge into the vehicle; the dumb negro leaped upon the forward seat, and seizing the reins, started the horse down a rocky descent.

Not until its foot was reached did conversation again become possible.

Then, turning toward the girl by his side, Colonel Walsingham broke silence thus:

"Miss Livingston, will you be good enough to explain the meaning of your singular words?"

"I hardly know what to say, sir. I did not purposely listen to your conversation—I—that is—I heard a name mentioned that——"

"That made you suspect me?"

"Yes."

"What was the name?"

"It was the name of one whom I despise above all other persons, Colonel Walsingham. But why ask me? You heard it plainer than I did myself."

"Do you refer to Heming?"

"I do. Were it not that my father lies ill, dying perhaps, and has summoned me to his bedside, no power on earth could prevail upon me to encounter the risk of meeting Mr. Heming at Ballentyne Hall."

"Miss Livingston," said Colonel Walsingham, after a few moments of silence, "I again tell you that you are laboring under a grave mistake. It is impossible that the Mr. Heming to whom my friend at the station referred and the man you hate can be one and the same. Calm your fears, my dear young lady. Do not forget that I am your father's friend—that he has commissioned me to escort you to his bedside. Do not forget, moreover, that I am a Virginian and a gentleman. Rather than betray the confidence reposed in me by a lady—particularly one so young and beautiful as yourself—I would rather die."

"Spare your compliments, Colonel Walsingham. So that you escort me in safety to the bedside of my dying father, I have no more to ask."

For a brief space silence was now maintained.

Meanwhile the horses sped over the rocky, uneven road—now crawling wearily up a steep ascent, now rattling down a sharp decline, ever urged forward by the silent Jehu, who knew how to handle the reins, if not his tongue.

The road for the first half hour followed closely the bed of the mountain stream. On either side of them rose a dense forest of pine and spruce, the dark growth rendering their way even more impenetrable than would otherwise have been the case.

As they continued to advance Colonel Walsingham glanced about him uneasily.

He was an entire stranger to the country which he was now travelling, never having been in this part of the State of Virginia before.



Nor was his companion much better acquainted with the locality.

Though born at Ballentyne Hall, the ancient manorial residence of the Ballentyne-Livingston family—among the proudest of Virginia's F. F. V.'s—she had been reared since the age of ten at a convent in the immediate neighborhood of the city of New York.

Consequently, when informed that her stepfather—for he bore no nearer relation—General Ballentyne-Livingston, lay at the point of death, and desired her to place herself in charge of Colonel Walsingham, who would escort her to his bedside, it was to Katherine Livingston almost as to one who journeys to a land wholly strange.

Bearing the same name as her stepfather, she stood in a double relation to General Livingston, viz., the only daughter of a distant cousin and of his own deceased wife.

Thus Ballentyne Hall, whither Miss Livingston was now bound, was her own property—inherited through her father—the man to whose bedside she now hurried being only a tenant by the right of guardianship over her person and large estates.

As the density of the forest increased about them the uneasiness of Colonel Walsingham seemed to grow in like proportion.

"Are you certain that we are on the right road, Miss Livingston?" he inquired. "I had not believed that the distance was half so great!"

"I begin to doubt it myself," was the reply. "As I can recollect the country around Ballentyne Hall, it has seemed to me that we have been going wrong since we took that last sharp turn to the left."

"And I was informed that it was not over three miles from the station. We have certainly come five. If one could only get anything out of that black scoundrel, now. Here, you! Are we on the right road to Ballentyne Hall?"

The question, put to the dumb driver in sheer desperation, of course, elicited no reply.

Meanwhile, the clouds which had long been gathering about them burst at last, and the rain began to fall with a force which threatened to wet them to the skin.

"Oh, I can stand this no longer!" cried Colonel Walsingham, starting to climb over the back of the seat to the dumb driver's side. "This forest seems endless, and—Great heavens! what is that in the valley below us? There is treachery here! Something is wrong!"

The instant he had made the movement to interfere with the driver the negro had plied the whip vigorously, urging the horses on into a run.

At the same moment they reached the top of a long ascent, and, the forest suddenly breaking, a bright light could be seen burning in the valley far beneath them at the foot of a ragged cliff, along the very edge of which ran the road.

It was this light which had attracted the attention of Colonel Walsingham.

It proved to be a large fire burning in the midst of a military encampment, by the side of a rushing stream.

"It is the Federal outpost!" he exclaimed, in great alarm. "We are on the wrong road. I knew it! Here, you dumb idiot, drop those reins!"

It was an interference which the driver resented on the instant.

Turning upon Colonel Walsingham, he struck him a blow between the eyes which would have stunned an ordinary man.

Blinded with pain and in a towering rage, Miss Livingston's escort seized the deaf mute by the throat.

For one instant they were seen to struggle—the next and

both toppled headlong from the vehicle; disappearing over the edge of the cliff.

The terror-stricken girl saw it all, being, of course, unable to extend a helping hand.

Freed from all restraint, the horses now tore down the mountain road with breakneck speed, the wagon swaying from side to side, each moment threatening to slip from the track and to drag its terrified occupant to a dreadful death.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE GHOSTS OF THE ANCIENT HALL.

"I expected a conveyance to meet me here to take me forward on my journey."

Thus spoke the army officer at the Dugdale station, as the evening train from Harper's Ferry rolled away.

"Whar ye gwine, kunel?" demanded the station agent, in response to this remark.

"It don't matter. My name is Carsten. There was to be a carriage here to meet me——"

"Kerridges is skurce in these parts, kunel. Be you from York?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Cause a party telegraphed here yesterday, an' your name was mentioned in the dispatch."

"Possibly. I cannot answer your questions. You have seen no one inquiring for me, I suppose?"

"Didn't say no sich a thing," replied the station agent, biting off a huge mouthful from a coil of plug tobacco. "Thar wuz a dummy nigger here a minute before the train come in axin' for ye. He's over acrost the stream beyond a-waitin' for ye with his team."

Joe Barkley—for it was the young Secret Service detective, of course—waited for no further words.

Crossing the track and the foot-bridge which spanned the mountain torrent, he reached the hitching posts just in time to see the two-seated wagon containing Colonel Walsingham and Miss Livingston go bowling down the road.

"Now I wish I had not been so quick to draw back from that girl," muttered the young man, as he stood gazing after them. "Heavens! but wasn't she a beauty! There was something wrong with that escort of hers—I have been watching them all the way from Washington. Besides, unless I greatly mistake, he is the fellow who pushed by me at the telegraph office—Hello, Sambo! What ails you?"

It was the second of the deaf mutes.

He had thrust himself in front of the disguised detective, and was extending a piece of paper which he held in his hand.

"This is Mr. Carsten's carriage," was the way the paper read.

"It is the dumb negro," muttered Joe Barkley. "Well, so much the better—I shan't be bothered to answer his questions."

Climbing into the vehicle while the boy unhitched the horses, they were soon under way.

It was all the result of the trifling mistake of the telegraph operator.

Long before Colonel Walsingham had begun to suspect the truth the vehicle containing Joe Barkley emerged from the forest at the foot of a steep ascent leading up to an ancient-looking manor house of gray stone which stood perched upon the very edge of a shelving rock, five hundred feet and more above the bed of the stream.

As the dumb driver directed the horses' heads up the ascent



Joe Barkley stared at the gray house on the rock with unfeigned surprise.

Was that the farmhouse where the secret conference was to be held?

The country for miles around them was one unbroken forest, presenting no appearance of agriculture whatsoever; besides, instead of having covered a distance of twenty miles from Dugdale, they certainly had not come over three.

It was useless to attempt to interrogate the dumb driver.

In response to all the signs made by Joe Barkley, the negro would only smile and point upward to the gray house on the rock.

"Perhaps, after all, we are not going to stop there," thought the detective, as the road, turning, entered the woods again, and the house above them disappeared from view.

There was nothing for it but to trust himself to the guidance of his singular companion and patiently await results.

Meanwhile the road continued to wind back and forth up the mountain side.

At each turn Joe Barkley expected to see the gray house on the rock burst into view again, only to be disappointed by a continuance of the everlasting pine trees which lined the road on either side.

It came at last, however, and came when least expected.

As nearly as Joe could calculate—it was too dark to consult his watch—it must have been somewhere in the neighborhood of eleven o'clock when the vehicle passed through a gateway and drew up before the rear entrance to the old mansion of which he had caught a glimpse nearly an hour before.

The dumb driver leaped from his seat and pointed toward the house.

"That's the place, is it?" muttered Joe, as he proceeded to descend from the wagon. "Well, it's about as lonely and desolate a looking shop as ever I struck, but I suppose it's all right if you say so, Sambo. What am I to do, go right in?"

The dumb negro, seemingly interpreting the question, nodded, and pointed toward the door.

Though no light was displayed in or about the mansion, the detective moved toward it.

As he did so the negro leaped into the wagon, and wheeling the horses suddenly about, drove off in the direction by which they had come.

With a curious sensation of uneasiness Joe Barkley stopped and stared after the retreating wagon.

There was nothing for it now but to enter the mansion forthwith.

Before doing so, however, he passed entirely around it, becoming more and more mystified at finding that it stood utterly alone.

It was surrounded by the thick pine growth, and was seemingly without outbuildings of any sort.

Three stories in height, and built of rough gray stone, it stood there on the top of the beetling cliff, occupying a situation more lonely and desolate than had even appeared from below.

There was no light, no sign of life.

After repeated knockings, which remained unanswered, Joe Barkley ventured at last to try the door.

It was open, and communicated with a wide passage extending entirely through the house.

Lighting a match, the detective looked about him curiously.

The passage was handsomely carpeted and was hung with deer horns, guns, game-bags, and other trophies of the chase.

"Looks like some old English castle," thought Joe Barkley. "Before my match goes out—confound it, it is out now, but here goes for another—I'll open this door and see if I can't

rout somebody up, for upon my word I don't like this thing at all."

He lit another match as he spoke, and advancing toward one of the many doors communicating with the passage, turned the knob.

The door opened freely, and Joe Barkley found himself in a high-studded hall presenting an appearance more peculiar than anything it had yet been his fortune to see.

On one side was a high oaken mantel, above which were stags' horns and suits of ancient armor. Two figures in armor, holding spears, appeared just beyond, while above them, between the pilasters supporting the ceiling, were full length pictures of men and women wearing the dress of the olden time.

Just at the moment the match went out, and Joe Barkley found himself in total darkness.

He was standing beside a chain in the center of the room, close to a great book with metal clasps, which he had observed lying on the floor as this occurred, and was just about to feel for another match, when strains of music from behind burst upon his ear.

Joe turned suddenly, peering off into the darkness.

As he did so, at one end of the room, beneath a carved oaken cornice placed against the wall midway between ceiling and floor, a sight burst upon him which seemed to freeze the very marrow of his bones.

It was as though a curtain at the theater had been gradually lifted, disclosing a scene on the stage.

First innumerable moving feet, covered with slippers, buskins and great flapping boots; then bodies of gentlemen and ladies clothed in the costumes of two hundred years ago.

Lastly the heads were disclosed, and the entire company were seen to be tripping the measure of a minuet—backward and forward, bowing and curtsying—their feet keeping time to the weird music which floated through the ancient hall, beside which there was not another sound.

## CHAPTER IV.

### JOE BARKLEY SEES THE GHOSTS AGAIN.

Fancy Joe Barkley's position!

Alone at midnight in this ancient mansion, staring at the ghastly forms which just before him could be distinctly seen moving back and forth, to and fro, following out the complex figures of the dance.

It was precisely as though some one had entered a theater in total darkness without understanding the nature of the place, and the curtain had been suddenly raised, disclosing the stage with all its brightness, its gaudily-dressed figures moving about in pantomime, while strains of music from a hidden orchestra float with weird sweetness through the surrounding air.

Such was the strange situation suddenly forced upon Joe Barkley.

For a length of time—it seemed moments, it was probably seconds—he stood rooted to the floor.

To say that he experienced no sensations of fear would be to state the case falsely.

At first glance it flashed through his mind that he had surprised the residents of the old mansion at a masquerade ball.

It was not until he perceived—and the time was but a second—that in spite of the activity of the dancers there was not a sound from the many footsteps that trod the smoothly waxed floor, that he first experienced that peculiar cold sensa-



tion about the heart which accompanies a state of sudden fear.

There the dancers were, the ladies in low-necked, short-waisted dresses, such as our great grandmothers wore; with high-heeled satin shoes, broad skirts, and powdered hair built up high from the forehead upon great tortoise shell combs. The gentlemen in pumps and knee-breeches, silk stockings, ruffled shirts and gay colored coats.

It was precisely as if a comic opera troupe, with all its gay accompaniment, had been suddenly dropped before Joe Barkley in that secluded mansion deep in the wilds of the Blue Ridge.

Fear!

It was no part of Joe Barkley's nature.

It could not long endure in the heart of a young man so brave.

With eyes fixed upon the dancers, he started to advance toward them, when—

Presto! Change!

The music ceased; the lights were extinguished; the room in which he stood was as black as the blackest night.

A cold perspiration broke over the young detective.

Mechanically he grasped the back of the armchair by the side of which he stood, as though expecting some shock to follow.

Nothing followed.

Nothing but silence, as profound as the silence of the grave.

The lights, the music, the moving dancers had all vanished, as utterly as though they had never had an existence save in his own excited brain.

"Great heavens! Into what manner of house have I fallen?" thought the young Secret Service detective. "What is going to happen next?"

He waited, breathless—expecting, fearing.

Nothing came.

"Come! I can't stand this," thought Joe, as the silence became more oppressive. "Whatever may be hidden in this funny business, I'm going to have it out. It begins to look to me very much as if I had walked into a trap. If so, they shall find me game."

He knew well the desperate straits into which the Southern Confederacy had drifted; understood thoroughly that, providing his mission proved successful, that it would precipitate the fall of Richmond, and bring about the end.

Possibly others knew this as well as he did, and had devised this ghostly farce to scare him off, and prevent him from obtaining the information for which he had been sent.

During the moment the room had been lighted Joe Barkley had perceived on the mantel-piece a curious old candlestick, with three candles therein.

Striking his last match, he now moved toward it, and in an instant had all the light he needed.

The last vestige of his terror vanished with the light.

Taking the candlestick from the mantel, he proceeded to make a survey of the room.

His first move was toward the end in which the strange vision had appeared.

There was nothing, absolutely nothing, to be discovered.

It was against dark panels of solid wood that his hand was pressed.

These panels extended higher than his head, and were surmounted by Gothic ornamentation, such as one sees behind altars in churches.

There was no door, no window—nothing to give any clew to the mystery at all.

"Come," thought Joe, "I must have been dreaming."

And as he continued his survey of the room it certainly seemed so.

Every picture, every piece of furniture, the suits of ancient armor were all there, substantial enough, but of the merry dancers there was absolutely no trace to be found.

Joe Barkley crossed the length of the room to the opposite end.

Here were two great folding doors of solid mahogany.

They were locked, and resisted every effort on his part to move them.

Whatever of mystery lay behind these doors was not disclosed.

Disappointed in this direction, Joe went out into the hall again, looking about him curiously.

Now he observed one circumstance to which he had previously given no thought.

The hall, as well as the room beyond, was exceedingly damp and cold.

It seemed evident that for a long time no fires could have been lighted in the mansion.

A musty odor was also apparent, like the odor of a tomb.

Observing a bell-cord against the wall, Joe pulled it several times in quick succession.

He could hear the loud jangling of a bell in some distant part of the house, but though he waited long and patiently, no one appeared in response to his ring.

There were two flights of stairs leading from the hall.

One descended into what must be the kitchen and servants' apartments below; the other seemed to be the main stairway of the mansion, leading to the chambers above.

There were also several doors communicating with other rooms.

Determined not to abandon his ground thus easily, Joe Barkley tried the various doors in quick succession.

The first was the door leading into the room which he knew must communicate with the apartment behind the locked folding doors.

This door was also fastened.

It was plain that in this particular direction no discovery was to be made.

Another door led into a kind of business office, furnished with a curious old desk, tables, and chairs.

This room was as cold as the rest of the house, and the detective did not fail to observe that here also the dust lay thick upon the floor.

The same was true with a larger room, a library, with which another of the doors communicated.

It was elegantly furnished in the same ancient style. Books by the hundred reposed on shelves ranged around the wall, but it was evident from the dust and the moldy smell, which was here more noticeable even than elsewhere, that no one had penetrated the apartment for many a day.

Two other locked doors were tried.

The only door which now remained untried was one at the extreme end of the hall, which unquestionably communicated with the piazza observed by Joe at the front of the house.

This was also locked, but it made no difference, as the piazza could be easily gained by going around the other way.

What was to be done next?

Naturally the detective felt a reluctance to either penetrate into the lower regions of the mansion or into the apartments above.

Though resolved to do both if necessary, he determined first to make another survey of the exterior, particularly of the windows of these upper chambers, before ascending the stairs.

Setting the candlestick upon a table in the hall, Joe Barkley opened the door and stepped upon the porch.



Here he discovered that the threatened storm had broken, and the rain was pouring in torrents—a circumstance which he had not previously observed.

Drawing his military cloak around him, the detective now stepped out into the rain and looked about him.

There was the same thick growth of pines and spruce, now darker than ever; and again he did not fail to notice the lack of out-buildings and the entire absence of cultivated ground about the mansion.

It seemed to stand on the top of the rock in the midst of the primeval forest, desolate and alone.

Joe Barkley walked slowly around the house, looking up at the windows on the sides.

There was nothing of a suspicious nature to be seen there—that was evident.

Every window was dark. Save for the beating of the rain against the gray stone walls and the sighing of the wind among the pines, all was as silent as the grave.

By this time Joe had reached the front of the mansion, and stood on the very verge of the cliff looking up at the darkened front.

Evidently it never could have been the intention of the builder that this should be used as the main entrance.

There was scarcely space between the piazza and the abrupt descent of fully five hundred feet for an ordinary sized carriage to drive.

And the piazza itself presented a most striking appearance. It was constructed in the Grecian style of architecture, with high pillars, extending from the ground to the projecting roof.

It was much in the same style as one sees in pictures of the home of George Washington—Mount Vernon—giving to the house an appearance of greater height than it really deserved.

It was a little difficult to obtain a good view of the windows, as they were all inside the line of pillars, and greatly in the shadow.

They were all dark, however, and Joe Barkley was about to turn away when a gust of wind struck him with such force as to almost fling him over the edge of the cliff.

With the wind came the rain.

Rain! It was a torrent!

It was as though the very flood gates of heaven had burst upon the mountain tops.

Then it was Joe Barkley beheld that which seemed to freeze his marrow—to turn every drop of warm blood in his veins to ice.

It was in the upper windows behind the pillars.

While the lower tier remained as dark as ever, at each window of the two stories above appeared figures set in a background of light, with raised hands and long, ghostly forefingers pointing directly at himself.

They were men and women, dressed as he had seen them in the hall inside in the quaint costumes of a hundred years ago.

For one instant they pointed toward him from those windows blazing with ghostly radiance, then—

All was darkness, rain, and howling wind.

Wind, darkness, and rain.

at breakneck speed, there is not one woman in a thousand who would not have lost her head, thrown herself from the wagon to certain death, or held on to the seat or sides in an agony of dull despair.

Of a different sort was Katherine Livingston.

Her method of handling the situation was exactly the reverse.

The first sensations of horror at the awful fate of Colonel Walsingham and the dumb driver over, the courageous girl nerved herself to the situation.

Let us record right here that the nerves of Katherine Livingston were nerves of steel.

Born, though not reared, among these Virginian mountains, the girl possessed all the courage and coolness of her race.

At a glance she saw that nothing short of instantly gaining the control of the frightened horses could save her, and this was exactly what she proceeded to do.

At the risk of her life she climbed the front seat of the wagon and leaned forward over the dashboard.

Then with soothing words she strove to calm the startled animals, while with her right hand she drew in the dangling reins.

The attempt was successful.

Once the well-trained beasts felt the pressure of the bit their excitement diminished.

Without attempting to check them entirely—a thing impossible on that abrupt descent—Katherine soon succeeded in bringing them entirely under her control.

Then came the momentous question.

Was she to advance or retreat?

Clearly there was but one answer, since to turn would be impossible.

It was the remembrance of Colonel Walsingham and his fate which filled her soul with dismay.

Just then the storm broke upon the mountains, the rain descended in torrents.

At that very moment in which Joe Barkley beheld that startling vision at the windows of the gray house on the rock, the horses, restrained rather than guided by Katherine Livingston, reached a level plateau and turned abruptly into a by-path to the right, drew the wagon with great rapidity down another descent, and rattled across a little wooden bridge which spanned the mountain stream.

Here they turned again and followed the stream on the other side for a distance of several miles.

Katherine made no effort to interfere with them.

It was as well this way as any other.

Surely they must come out upon some farmhouse on this low land before long.

At all events they were going away from the military encampment seen from the heights, which was the place of all others she naturally desired to avoid.

But the succeeding moments brought continued disappointment.

No farmhouse appeared, the further they penetrated the lonelier the road seemed to become.

Wet to the skin and now thoroughly alarmed, Katherine was about to give up in despair when all at once the everlasting line of trees seemed to part, and she beheld a small church of red sandstone standing in the forest alone.

Now an exclamation of joy escaped the lips of the frightened girl.

"It is the old red church!" she murmured. "In spite of the years which have elapsed since I last beheld it, I remember it perfectly. Thank God, its walls will at least afford me shelter. Once the storm is over, I can easily find my way to Ballentyne Hall. As I recall the distance, it is now not over a mile away.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH.

It was a desperate state of affairs for Katherine Livingston.

Alone in a wild, unknown country, descending a rocky, precipitous road in a wagon drawn by a pair of runaway horses



There was a covered shed behind the church intended for a shelter for horses, and behind this Katherine immediately drove.

It was a relief to get out of the rain, if nothing more, and she alighted from the wagon and fastened the horses with a feeling of thankfulness in her heart.

Now in passing around to this shed Katherine Livingston's attention had been entirely directed toward the team.

Had it been otherwise, and had she chanced to direct her gaze more closely toward the church, she might have perceived the door facing the road noiselessly open to a width sufficient to admit the body of a man.

This, however, she did not see; nor did she see a head shrouded in some sort of a black robe which at the same moment appeared in the breach.

Long before Katherine had reached the door of the church, toward which she immediately bent her steps, it had been closed as softly as it was previously opened, and the head being withdrawn, was seen no more.

There was no light visible in the windows of the church; all was as dark and gloomy within as without.

Still this did not deter the brave girl from entering.

She remembered the old red church as the house in which her parents had worshiped, and to which she herself had been taken on the Sabbath many times in her girlhood days.

Remembering this, and knowing the entire isolation of its situation, Katherine felt that she ran no risk in entering.

The little graveyard, with its crumbling headstones which surrounded it, had no terrors for a heart so courageous, and she passed among the stones fearlessly, and with firm hand pressed the latch.

It yielded to her touch.

Passing through the vestibule, she entered the darkened interior, and groped her way to the very pew in which she had often sat by her mother's side upon a drowsy summer's afternoon in the bygone time.

The church windows were high, and on one side turned toward the valley.

As Katherine's eyes became accustomed to the dimness she found herself able to see much of the interior.

There was the pulpit, the high-backed pews, the little organ in one corner—all just the same.

Katherine Livingston seated herself in the family pew prepared to wait.

Time passed.

The storm without the church had spent its force hours before, and the clouds disappearing, the moon burst with all her splendor over the wooded tops of the Blue Ridge.

Still the horses remained beneath the shed, and no one appeared to claim them.

The church door had not opened, the windows had remained undisturbed.

Yet the pew in which Katherine Livingston had seated herself was now vacant.

No one had entered the old red church, no one had passed out.

Yet as morning dawned, had anyone chanced to enter, they would have found it utterly untenanted.

Deserted and as silent as the grave.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A VISION IN THE NIGHT.

It took Joe Barkley just ten seconds to recover from the paralyzing effect of this new ghostly demonstration.

With a sudden spring forward he darted between the Grecian columns, gaining the piazza at a bound.

He might as well have spared himself the exertion.

There was nothing more to be discovered on the piazza than there had been on the edge of the cliff.

The front of the gray house was now black enough in all conscience. Through the windows not a ray of light penetrated, not a vestige of the ghostly figures was to be seen.

"Good-evenin', kun'l."

Suddenly and without the sound of warning footsteps these words were spoken from outside the pillars behind Joe Barkley's back.

To the already excited nerves of the young officer they produced a shock even greater than the recent mysterious appearance at the window had been.

He turned abruptly.

There, leaning calmly against one of the pillars, and inspecting him curiously, stood a tall, gaunt individual—as true a specimen of the Virginia "corncracker" as Joe had ever seen.

He was a man fully six feet high, with sallow, sunken cheeks, prominent nose, low forehead, and small, pig-like eyes.

Such hair as he still possessed had turned a greenish gray; fiery red chin whiskers trimmed a la Billy Goat gave to his face the appearance of being half a yard long at the very least.

A suit of gray cloth—Virginia homespun—covered his bony frame, while a dirty collarless shirt and a white felt hat lent their aid to make the man's costume as unpromising as his face.

In spite of the rain, he was smoking a corn-cob pipe, sheltering the bowl now and then with his brown, hairy hand to prevent its being emptied by the wind.

"Good-evenin', kun'l."

Joe Barkley surveyed his visitor narrowly.

At all events he was human—there was no doubt of that.

Could this be the farmer to whom he had been consigned?

Or, possibly, the spy himself?

"Good-evening, sir. Good-evening," he replied briskly, with the true instinct of a detective on the alert at once. "I'm thankful to meet someone at last. Beside the dummy who drove me I've seen no one since my arrival at this gloomy place."

The "corncracker" stepped inside the line of Grecian columns with a surly grunt.

"Hain't seed no one? Kun'l, look out for yer soul. Didn't yer see them figgers up thar at them winders? If ye didn't, I did. It's my opinion ye did, too."

"Well, I admit it. Who are they?"

The face of the corncracker assumed an air of solemn mystery.

Taking his pipe from his mouth he leaned forward and whispered just one word close to Joe Barkley's ear.

"Ghosts!"

"What!"

"I said ghosts. Be ye deaf? Them wuz the ghosts of Balcantyne Hall."

"Oh!"

"I'm givin' it to yer straight eout, kun'l; but, law bless ye, I don't mind 'em. I've lived among 'em, man and boy, nigh onto fifty years."

And the corncracker, bracing himself against the Grecian column, crossed his feet, restored the pipe to his yellow teeth, and began placidly smoking again.

Joe Barkley was puzzled.

With such a tough specimen of human nature to deal with, what was he going to do?



If this was not the place where he was to meet the Union spy, a word, a look might in those troublous days have betrayed him to certain death.

He felt, therefore, that it behooved him to be careful—to feel his way. The trouble was to know where to begin.

The corncracker helped him.

After a moment of embarrassing silence he turned suddenly upon Joe, his great mind having evolved the following:

"My name's Kinnicutt. What's yourn?"

"Carsten," replied Joe, promptly.

Then he waited, watching anxiously for the effect.

Certainly it was not to be read in the corncracker's face.

That was absolutely expressionless.

After a few minutes he began again.

"What brung ye here, kun'l?"

"A dumb negro and a horse and wagon."

"Yes, yes. But why'd ye come?"

Joe was more puzzled than ever. Suddenly it occurred to him to mention the name of the man at Dugdale to whom his dispatch had been addressed.

"Sidney Peterson."

The corncracker took out his pipe and stared.

"Peterson!" he ejaculated. "Be ye a blue or a gray?"

"Neither—both. I am a private citizen just now."

"Then what brung ye to Ballentyne Hall? Did ye come from York?"

"Yes."

"Brought no lady with you?"

"No."

"Then what in time did ye come here for, anyhow? The hall's deserted—has been ever sence General Livingston went off to the war. Hain't a soul about the place but Pete, the dummy, an' me."

"I begin to think there has been some mistake made, Mr. Kinnicutt. Certainly I never intended to come here. How it occurred I can't tell, but I'm more than anxious to get away. If you'll lend me your horses and the darky I'll go back to Dugdale again."

Fully convinced of the truth of these words, Joe waited anxiously for the man's reply.

It came at last, after much meditation.

"Ye can't go back to-night. I won't let the hosses go over the road, and I'm blame sure ye can't walk."

"Then perhaps you'll accommodate me with a bed until morning?"

"S'pose I'll hev to, though I'd ruther not. My shanty down in the piney woods, back of the lane, hain't got no bed into it but one, and that I sleep in. S'pose I'll hev to make ye a bed in the hall if ye ain't afeard of ghosts."

"Will they hurt me?"

"Well, I guess not. They never did me. Ye've been inside already, ain't yer?"

"Yes."

"See anything?"

"I saw people dancing."

"And heard music a-playin'? It's their old trick. They're always at it along around Christmas time. Say, ye didn't see no young lady and gent at the Dugdale Station, I s'pose?"

"But I did, though."

And Joe described Katherine Livingston and her companion as well as he could.

"Humph," said the corncracker, "I see now. Them's the ones what orter hev come in that air wagon, kun'l. Your get-ting into it was all the dummy's mistake, an' yet ye say yer name is Carsten?"

"It certainly is."

"Blame me ef I can understand it," muttered the corncracker. "One thng sartin—thar's suthin' wrong."

Joe thought so too, but deemed it wiser to say nothing.

Having no disposition to attempt the journey back to Dugdale at midnight and in the storm, he saw no alternative but to accept Mr. Kinnicutt's offer of a bed.

The corncracker seemed to have fallen into a sullen silence.

Rejecting every offer on the part of Joe toward friendliness, he led the way back to the mansion, up the stairs, and ushered the detective into a large chamber by the light of the candles Joe had left in the hall.

It was comfortably furnished, and overlooked the piazza.

Joe saw at once that at the window, now before him one of the ghostly figures must have stood.

Still there seemed no help for it, and upon the withdrawal of the custodian of the old mansion he extinguished the candles and flung himself upon the high four-post bed without removing any portion of his clothes.

Now, just when Joe Barkley fell asleep he was never able to accurately determine.

It must have been along toward morning, for during what appeared to be an interminable time he lay tossing and turning, unable to close his eyes.

Once asleep he began to dream.

First of his mission, then of New York, and then of the young lady to whom he had spoken at the station.

It seemed to him that he was precisely where he was—in the gray house on the rock and in bed.

That at one end of the room was a dark, oaken panel, which suddenly opened like a door, from out of which the young lady glided, and approaching the bed, looked down upon his face with a strange expression, and placed a sealed letter upon the pillow beside his head.

Then with the same gliding motion she retreated toward the panel, and—

Wonder of wonders!

He was broad awake now, and sitting upright in bed.

There, gliding from the bed, was the young lady he had spoken to at the station.

She was dressed in a white robe, with a light shawl thrown over her shoulders.

Without pausing to look behind her at the detective's sudden exclamation of astonishment, she moved noiselessly toward one end of the room, and appeared to vanish through the solid wall.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER—THE FATE OF SYDNEY PETERSON.

Joe Barkley was out of bed and on his feet in an instant.

Had it been all a dream?

No; it could not have been.

A moment before the form of the beautiful girl whom he had met at the station had bent over him—the room had been light—he was awake and saw it—now, all was as black as the blackness of the darkest night.

As we have previously mentioned, the young Secret Service detective had removed none of his clothing upon retiring—his situation had been too singular and the times too troublous for him to assume any risks.

He had anticipated disturbance of his rest, and had been in a measure prepared for it; but he had not anticipated so lovely a night vision as that which had just vanished before his astonished gaze.

"Ye gods! but she was beautiful!" muttered the young man, grasping his revolver with one hand while he rubbed his eyes with the other. "It is the girl I saw at the station—I can swear to it; and yet—"



And yet she had passed through the side of the room like a spirit, vanishing through the solid oak paneling of the wall.

Fearful of encountering some unseen enemy in the darkness, Joe Barkley proceeded with the greatest caution.

Matches he had none, having used up his last in the hall below.

Bitterly he regretted his folly in extinguishing the candle upon retiring, but it was too late to help it now.

Crossing the room he gained the oaken panel through which the young girl had vanished.

Though he ran his hand up and down the wood many times, he was unable to discover any opening, or any indication that at this particular point the paneling was not as solid and immovable as in any other part of the room.

The door proved to be locked on the inside precisely as he had left it on retiring. As for the windows, the faint light which did no more than to indicate their positions was still sufficient to make it plain that these likewise were undisturbed.

"It must have been all a dream!" thought the young man. "That the first part was I am certain; now against my strongest impressions I am obliged to admit the same for the last."

He was about to move toward the bed again when a tremendous racket broke upon his ear.

It was as though a man had fallen down the entire flight of stairs.

The sound of his body going bump! bump! bump! from stair to stair could be heard with startling distinctness.

Then followed quick footsteps, muffled imprecations, and all was still.

For ten minutes at least Joe Barkley stood as though rooted to the floor.

What was going to happen next?

Were the ghosts of Ballentyne Hall at their nightly work again?

Suddenly a strange light seemed to illuminate the room, coming from the windows.

It was a white, silvery light, of such a ghostly character as to send Joe's heart thumping to his throat.

Grasping his revolver still more firmly, he now sprang toward the window, prepared for anything, when all at once he perceived that it was the moon.

"See here, my friend, you are getting childish," he breathed, exasperated at his own timidity. "You are only half awake, and are dreaming still. Better go back to bed, and——"

Joe Barkley paused suddenly.

He was at the window now and looking out.

The view was of the valley beneath the cliff and the mountain tops beyond.

He could see this through the Grecian columns of the piazza, and he could also see three men, wearing the gray army cloaks of the Confederate service, booted and spurred, in the act of mounting horses off a little to the right of the house.

Evidently one of the men was deeply intoxicated—it was as much as his companions could do to get him on the horse; but even while Joe gazed down upon them this was accomplished, and all three spurring their horses, rode into the surrounding pines and disappeared.

"Come, that's something tangible at all events," thought the detective. "After all, this house is not deserted. It has opened my eyes. If the rebs make this their rendezvous it is no place for me."

And as he continued to peer from the window he found the light momentarily increasing.

It was not moonlight now, but the gray light of dawn.

Morning had come upon him without his knowing it.

With the night all ghostly terrors vanished, and Joe resolved upon leaving the house without delay.

If the "corncracker" could not furnish him transportation he must go on foot.

His business was by far too pressing to make it safe to run any further risk. He must hurry back to Dugdale, see and talk with the man Peterson, to whom his dispatch had been addressed.

His mind filled with anxious forebodings, Joe Barkley turned from the window and moved toward the door.

In so doing it was necessary for him to pass the bed on which he had slept.

There, to his astonishment, a sealed letter lay upon the pillow, in precisely the position in which he had seen it placed by the young lady of his dream.

Was he awake, or still dreaming?

Certainly the letter was a reality. He had it in his hands now. It bore no address.

Moving back to the window, Joe broke the seal.

It contained a sheet of white paper, on which a few hasty lines were written. Also an inclosure, likewise sealed.

There was barely light enough to enable Joe to make out the words.

He managed to read them through, only to become more deeply involved in mystery than before.

The words written on the paper were these:

"At the risk of life itself this is placed in your hands. If you desire to save the city of New York from destruction, hasten back without an instant's delay, and lay the inclosed before the police."

This was all.

The writing was delicate and well rounded—evidently a woman's.

The inclosed envelope bore neither name nor address.

Breathlessly Joe Barkley broke the seal of the inclosure.

He was well aware that the Confederates had made one attempt to burn New York city.

Was another plot as dastardly about to be disclosed?

But the sealed letter disclosed nothing.

It contained several rows of figures, running not in columns, but from left to right across the sheet.

They were these:

"1-7, 6, 1-8, 1-5, 1-6, 10, 13, 1-12, 444, 13, 1-7, 1, 5, 10, 1-1, 5, 7, 6, 1-7, 1, 13, 1-1, 1-10, 5, 1-7, 1-5, 9, 9, 1-1, 6, 13, 1-1, 10, 3, 9, 1-5, 11, 6, 5, 9, 8, 1-7, 6, 9, 1-10, 1-2, 1-5, 10, 5, 1-6, 1-5; 5; 11; 6; 1, 1-2, 1-1, 10.

What was it?

Evidently a rebus—a cipher—a secret which hours of patient toil might fail to solve.

It was of no use to attempt to understand it, to turn it this way and twist it that.

Clearly it had been placed upon his pillow for a distinct and definite purpose, and that purpose, more than likely, was to draw him off from his own mission, and send him flying back to New York on a wild-goose chase.

Joe Barkley thrust the two sheets of paper into his pocket and hastened toward the door, more determined than ever that nothing should turn him from his legitimate work.

The door was opened on the instant, and the detective hastened down the stairs and out of doors, only to encounter the imperturbable Mr. Kinnicutt leaning against the porch, puffing away at his corn-cob pipe, precisely as though he had never gone to bed at all.

Should he speak to this man concerning what he had seen?



Should he seek to penetrate into the secrets of the gray house on the rock?

Wise Joe Barkley did neither one nor the other; but simply bidding Mr. Kinnicutt good-morning, asked if he could be accommodated with a horse.

"The dummy's going to the station presently; you can go with him if you want to," was the slow reply.

"Of course I want to, neighbor," replied the detective. "I'm in a big hurry to get back to my business. When does the dummy start?"

"Thar he comes now," answered the cornercracker, as the wagon in which Joe had ridden the night before suddenly emerged from among the pines. "But I say, kun'l, won't you stop an' take breakfast long o' me?"

"No, thanks, I am in great haste. I suppose the team is all ready?"

"All ready. The dummy, he's had his breakfast. Say, did you see anything of the ghosts last night?"

"Nothing of the sort."

The cornercracker eyed him sharply, at the same time giving utterance to an incredulous grunt.

"They're generally at their wust 'long toward mornin'. They kick up high jinks in the old hall, sometimes, I tell you!"

"Well, they didn't last night, anyhow. I slept like a log," said Joe Barkley, leaping into the wagon. "Sorry to have put you about, neighbor, but it was all a mistake. Much obliged for the bed. How much's to pay?"

"To pay?"

"Yes."

"Not a durned cent. I'm a Virginian, I am. Guess I hain't been made too poor by them blamed Yankees to show a little old Virginy hospitality. Oh, no! Not much!"

And as Joe Barkley last saw the cornercracker he was still leaning against the porch smoking his corncob, with a face as unexpressive as the face of a sphinx.

The ride to Dugdale was accomplished in safety and silence. Of course the wagon halted at the stream.

Leaping out, the detective hurried across the little foot-bridge and ran up the station steps.

Evidently a train was expected, for the agent was there bustling about; also a passenger or two, and several loungers, staring at Joe with open mouths.

As the station agent was also the telegraph operator, the detective drew him aside.

"My friend, I want to find a man by the name of Sidney Peterson," he said. "Can you direct me to where he lives?"

The station agent stared.

"Sidney Peterson! Great gosh!"

"What did you say?"

"I said great gosh, stranger, and I had good reason to say it, too. Sidney Peterson was took out'n his bed last night, after midnight, by the rebel raiders, and hanged to a tree. His house was burned to the ground."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### WHAT HAPPENED IN THE CHURCH.

Meanwhile where was Katherine Livingston?

Let us return to the moment at which we left her seated in the Livingston pew in the old red church, and seek to learn what befell that frail and beautiful girl.

It was after the lapse of at least ten minutes before there came the slightest interruption to the musings of the storm-bound heiress of Ballentyne Hall.

She sat there in the almost total darkness, listening to the patter of the rain upon the shingle roof, without so much as a thought of fear.

Suddenly Katherine became conscious of a slight sound.

It seemed as if something must have struck gently upon the back of one of the pews just ahead of where she sat.

As a natural consequence she turned her gaze in that direction, encountering a sight which would have caused another to have screamed in deadly terror, to have fainted, or rushed precipitately from the church.

It was a pair of burning eyes peering at her out of the darkness over the back of the third pew, in front of the one in which she sat.

For one instant only the eyes were visible, then with a sudden downward movement they disappeared.

Katherine Livingston sat motionless.

Her terror was extreme, it cannot be denied; yet, as upon another memorable occasion the courageous girl proved herself equal to the trying situation.

And as she sat her own gaze wandered to the right—to the left.

There seemed to be other eyes staring at her out of the blackness in whichever direction she turned her own.

It was more than even she could endure.

With a feeling of deadly faintness, Katherine Livingston arose, stepped out into the aisle, and tottered toward the door.

She felt it coming—felt it even before she heard the sound of stealthy footsteps behind her.

She had not traversed half the distance between the pew and the church door before a hand grasped her shoulder from behind.

Before Katherine had time to utter a sound, she was pulled rudely around, and found herself facing a figure shrouded from head to foot in a long, black robe, arranged in such a manner as to prevent anything but the eyes from being seen.

Nor was this all.

At the same instant four similar figures arose from the pews and moved toward the terror-stricken girl along the aisles.

Then the first figure spoke:

"Why are you here?"

Katherine Livingston tried to answer, but her lips seemed powerless for speech.

"Throw a light on her face," said a deep voice from out of the darkness. "If she is a spy, that settles it. Let her be ever so many times a woman she must not leave this place alive."

At the same instant the rays of a dark-lantern were thrown upon her, and the same voice gave utterance to a startled cry.

"Great Heaven! What is this? The girl has the face of the Livingstons of Ballentyne Hall!"

The words recalled Katherine's fleeting courage.

"Gentlemen," she said, faintly, "I am a Livingston of Ballentyne Hall."

"Not Katherine Livingston who is expected to-night from New York?" asked the voice.

It was impossible to distinguish from which of the figures it proceeded, the dark-lantern having been immediately closed.

"Yes."

"Why are you here?"

"It is the result of an accident. If you are gentlemen and Virginians you will let me go."

"You cannot go yet. Was it you who drove under the shed?"

"Yes."

"Why did you come here? Speak! If your explanation is satisfactory, no harm will come to you."



"I came here to escape the rain." \*

"Where is your escort, Mr. Carsten?"

"I don't know who you mean. My escort was Colonel Walsingham. He is dead. An accident happened; he fell over the cliff."

"Colonel Walsingham dead!" breathed several voices.

Then there was whispering—words which Katherine could not hear.

Suddenly the rays of the dark-lantern were thrown on her face again.

There still stood the shrouded forms, their eyes fixed directly upon her, and a moment of awful silence followed, during which each pair of eyes seemed to study her face.

"I believe she speaks the truth, hang me if I don't," came in the same voice, as the light of the lantern was suddenly removed.

Then, while one of the figures still held Katherine by the arm, the others withdrew, and for the space of several moments conversed in undertones.

Presently one pair of eyes was seen advancing, and the voice made itself heard again.

"What are you going to do if we let you go?"

"I am going to drive to Ballentyne Hall, where my stepfather, General Livingston, lies dying."

"Do you know the road?"

"No; but I can find it. Gentlemen, I implore you to release me—to let me go."

"Miss Livingston, we would like to but we cannot. These are bad days for the Old Dominion; we have to be careful. You are a Virginian, but you have lived long among the Yankees. Speak! Are your sympathies with them or with us?"

"My sympathies must ever be with my native state. I am a Virginian to the last."

"It is well. You shall be escorted to Ballentyne Hall in safety; but you cannot drive there nor walk by the road. In this storm you would lose your way and perish. Follow me."

Thus speaking, one of the shrouded figures advanced, while he who still grasped Katherine's arm signified by a whispered word that it would be necessary for her to do the same.

There was no help for it.

Go she must whether she would or no.

As one shrouded figure moved before her up the aisle, the other led her respectfully but firmly behind.

Reaching the pulpit, the figure in advance bent downward and passed his hand rapidly along its base.

Suddenly the pulpit moved around as though upon a pivot.

At the same instant a dark-lantern flashed again, revealing an opening beneath the pulpit with a pair of stairs leading downward in the darkness to regions below.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE GREEN SHUTTER.

The train due at the Dugdale station at the time Joe Barkley was informed of the awful fate of Sidney Peterson reached Jersey City at half-past eleven o'clock on Wednesday night.

When the passengers alighted and hurried on board the ferryboat which was about to convey them to the foot of Cortlandt street there might have been observed walking quietly among the rest a young man, dressed in semi-military style, wearing a large cloak—an excellent garment for a night as cold as this particular Wednesday—buttoned well around him, and looking for all the world like Secret Service Detective Barkley himself.

Nor would appearances in this instance have led one who had known Joe Barkley very far astray.

It was Joe himself.

He had abandoned his mission and hastened north, taking passage, in fact, on that very morning train.

Nor had he made any mistake in this.

With the assassination of Sidney Peterson all hope of gaining communication with the Union spy had vanished.

Evidently their plan was discovered.

Though within the Union lines, the country around Dugdale was a hot-bed of Secessionists.

The manner in which they had served the unfortunate Peterson was significant.

Were he to tarry about the neighborhood, asking questions and trying to find the farmhouse to which he should have gone, there was no telling what moment Peterson's fate might be his own.

Besides this, the mysterious letter influenced the detective's movements.

Balked in one undertaking, he might yet succeed in another.

The letter in the woman's writing which had come so strangely into his possession, was, if its words told the truth, a communication of grave importance.

To-day the idea of a plot to burn the great metropolis of America may strike the reader as absurd.

Let us remind him that in 1864 times were different.

Already the thing had been tried, a similar plot discovered—and the citizens of New York were living in deadly terror lest it should be tried again, and the second time succeed.

Hence Joe Barkley's sudden resolution.

He resolved to lose no time in laying both letters before Lieutenant Marsden, his chief.

Now, after the train on which the young detective was a passenger left Washington, Joe became suddenly aware of a very singular thing.

He had entered the smoking car, and was about to seat himself and light a cigar, when to his utter astonishment, he saw ahead of him the dumb negro, Pete, who had driven him to and from Ballentyne Hall.

Joe could scarce believe his eyes.

It was certainly the boy, although he was dressed quite differently, evidently having gotten himself up for the journey with some attempt at style.

He had left Pete with his team on the other side of the little foot bridge not ten minutes before the train rolled into the Dugdale station, dressed in tattered trousers, blue woollen shirt, old gray coat, and a battered straw hat.

He now beheld him dressed in clothes as black as his face, white shirt with collar and tie; and wearing what in those days was known as a Kossuth cap, the top of which was brought down to the peak, and fastened to it with a hook and eye. Both clothes and cap were evidently new.

Here was a mystery, and an important one.

The dummy had come from the gray house on the rock where the important letter which Joe carried secreted about him had been obtained, consequently he must not be lost sight of until forced to tell everything he knew concerning that strange old mansion and the people to whom it belonged.

Joe Barkley walked toward the seat occupied by the negro, and placed himself beside him.

If this was any case of mistaken identity, he was resolved to find it out.

The negro did not appear to notice him, although he moved up a little to make more room.

"Going to New York, Pete?" asked the detective, in a tone quite loud enough for anyone to hear.



The negro, who was looking out of the window, made no answer.

He did not seem to have heard the remark at all.

"Going to New York, Pete?" exclaimed Joe, still louder, at the same time giving the fellow a poke with his elbow.

The darky turned and looked at him with a curious expression on his face.

Then, without showing in any way that he recognized his former passenger in the wagon, he placed his forefinger first to his mouth, then to his ears, and shook his head.

It was Pete, the dummy, sure enough!

Every effort of Joe Barkley's to communicate with the mute failed.

He could not talk, neither could he read or write. Joe knew nothing of the deaf and dumb alphabet, and it was exceedingly doubtful if the negro knew much more than himself.

After a number of ineffectual attempts to make the fellow recognize him, Joe at last withdrew.

During the remainder of the journey he kept a sharp eye upon Master Pete, although taking care to keep out of sight himself.

He soon discovered that the dumb negro was under the especial care of the conductor.

This explained his mysterious appearance in a measure.

Evidently he had been secretly taken on board at Dugdale, supplied with clothes by the southern conductor, who had upon their arrival at Washington consigned the lad to the care of his friend, the conductor of the northern train.

Thus it happened that when Joe Barkley walked on board the ferryboat at Jersey City, he was actively engaged in detective duty.

He was shadowing the dumb negro Pete.

To his surprise the darky showed no signs of bewilderment.

On the contrary, he steered directly for the gentlemen's cabin, quite as naturally as any old New Yorker would have done.

Joe Barkley entered neither.

Instead, he walked into the horseway, and there remained a few moments concealed from view.

When he again emerged he was an entirely different-looking individual.

His cloak had been transformed into a coat—it was built with especial reference to this very maneuver—instead of a clean-shaved stripling of two-and-twenty, he now wore grayish chin-whiskers and a mustache, looking the middle-aged man of forty-five.

In this disguise the secret service detective followed the unsuspecting Pete ashore.

Nor did he fail to observe the anxious looks the fellow shot around him, being evidently in search of himself.

At last he gave it up, and leaving the boat pushed through a line of bawling hackmen, and crossing West street, without the slightest hesitation or seeming at a loss to know what to do with himself amid a scene so different from his mountain home, headed straight up Cortlandt street in the direction of Broadway.

"Can he have been here before?" thought the detective. "It certainly looks so. He thinks he has shaken me off, and he must rest in the security of that idea, for come what will I must see exactly where his journey is to end."

He had chosen the opposite side of the way, and suffered himself to fall considerably in the rear of the dumb negro, but while keeping well out of sight in the shadow of the buildings himself, he never once suffered the fellow to pass beyond the reach of his eye.

Clearly, if Pete, the dummy, did not know what he was about no one ever did.

Upon reaching Broadway he turned to the left, and continued up that thoroughfare as far as Fulton street.

Passing beneath the iron bridge over Broadway at this corner—a structure long since removed—the negro walked rapidly along the opposite side of the way until Barnum's Museum—then standing at the corner of Ann street, on the site of the present Herald Building—was reached.

Here he stopped, and for fully ten minutes stood gazing idly up and down.

Meanwhile Joe Barkley was leaning against one of the supports of the iron bridge, watching every movement he made.

Suddenly the negro was gone.

With a bound Joe crossed Broadway, and whipping round into Ann street, saw him running at the top of his speed down the right hand side of that narrow alley.

He had already crossed Nassau street, and had the detective been an instant later he must have missed him altogether.

As it was he saw the dummy slide into an alleyway, which he knew led in behind a certain notorious saloon.

When Joe Barkley reached the gate it was locked.

This, however, did not deter him.

The saloon was closed also, and its front dark.

There was no one on the street to see him, as he deftly picked the lock of the alley gate with a skeleton-key, and entering closed it softly behind him.

The alley terminated in a small backyard from which opened a door leading into a room behind the saloon.

Beside the door there was a window concealed by a green shutter.

In the top of the green shutter an air-hole had been cut, as was the custom then, in the form of a half moon.

Through this opening a light could be seen burning.

There could be no doubt as to where the negro had gone.

Scarcely daring to breathe, Joe Barkley cast his eyes about the yard.

It was filled with boxes, barrels, and empty beer kegs and rubbish of various sorts.

Noiselessly the detective crept away, and capturing a beer keg, placed it alongside of the window, climbed upon it, pressed his eye to the opening in the green shutter, and peered into the room beyond.

## CHAPTER X.

### SAVED BY AN ASH-BOX.

At the first glance behind the green shutter Joe Barkley saw enough to satisfy him that in following the dumb negro Pete into the alley he had made no mistake.

Through the crescent-shaped opening in the shutter he could see the interior of the room behind the saloon plainly enough, for no curtain intervened.

There was a red-hot stove with a round table drawn up toward it, at which sat four men deep in a game of cards.

There was money on the table and a good deal of it; new crisp greenbacks of a larger pattern than the present paper money, bearing a peculiar signature which looked as though it had been written with a stick, it was so black and prominent, and Joe could see that the stakes ran high in the thousands, and the hot, anxious faces of the men betrayed their eagerness in the game.

All four were smoking, and it was evident that all had been drinking, for there were bottles and glasses on the floor within easy reach of their hands.

Behind the stove a red-faced German boy sat nodding, whose



white apron showed plainly enough that he was the bartender who had remained out of bed to supply the gamblers' wants.

Pete the dummy stood near the stove too.

He was staring at one of the men—a young southerner—with an intentness that showed the watcher at a glance that this person was the man he had come to see.

Joe Barkley surveyed the scene curiously.

The men all looked like Virginians, as they probably were.

Then he perceived that the young man in question was none other than the person to whom Colonel Walsingham—of course Joe did not know that unfortunate individual by name—had stopped to speak with at the Dugdale station, and whose words had caused Katherine Livingston to take alarm.

The man was well dressed and looked the gentleman, but a cold, evil look in his eye gave his face a disagreeable expression. He could be hard and cruel if he were so disposed.

It was easy to see that all were too interested in their game—it was poker—to bestow any attention to Pete, the dummy, at all.

Now, Joe Barkley in the course of his brief but successful career had watched many games of poker.

Never had he watched one under such peculiar circumstances as now, standing upon a beer keg peering through that crescent-shaped hole.

Presently it ended.

The younger Virginian scooping in the pot.

Then the red-faced German was awakened, the bottles placed on the table and much loud talking began.

"Look hyar, gents," exclaimed the elder Virginian, presently, after all had drank—he was a tall man with a long, gray beard, having rather a pleasant face and a merry twinkle in the corner of his eye—"Look hyar, gents, we've forgotten all about Pete. It's about time to see what the fellow has brought."

The elder man thus spoke in loud, penetrating tones—tones which the detective had no difficulty in hearing.

The reply, spoken in a more moderate voice, was lost.

Then the young man rose, and approaching the dummy, began making signs.

Immediately the negro took off his coat and then his vest, and finally, by running his hand around to his back beneath his shirt, at last produced a sealed letter, which he placed in the young man's hands.

The others watched this maneuver eagerly.

Upon receiving this letter the young man withdrew to the table—his companions stood watching him as he broke the seal.

Joe Barkley pressed his eye closer to the opening.

Drawing a folded sheet of paper from the envelope, the young Virginian held it up to the light.

It was a piece of blank paper—an unwritten page.

A loud exclamation burst from the lips of every one present.

The young man sprang forward, and, seizing the dummy by the ear, shook the page in his face—his words Joe could not hear.

Not so the words of the long-bearded man, however.

"Stop! don't hurt Pete!" he cried, springing forward. "It ain't his fault—someone has played a trick on him. Someone—Holy powers! What's that?"

It was a loud bang against the green shutter—a tremendous racket in the yard.

The brick pavement of the yard was icy beneath the window, and upon this ice Joe had placed the keg on which he stood.

In his eagerness to see all that transpired the detective had pressed more closely against the green shutter.

This movement had sent the keg flying from under him, and he had come down with a tremendous crash.

That ended the observations of Joe Barkley behind the green shutter.

He realized instantly that he now had all he could do to save his neck.

As he scrambled to his feet he could hear the unlocking of the door, and, what alarmed him still more, the sound of footsteps hurrying into the saloon.

"They are going to head me off in front," thought Joe. "If they do they all must be spry about it. I'll bet a hundred dollars that in my pocket is the very paper that nigger was to have brought."

He thought as he ran through the alley.

By the time he had gained the street he could hear quick footsteps following him—hear bolts in the act of being drawn behind the front door of the saloon.

Could he escape by running?

It was more than doubtful.

The street was utterly deserted, and to call for help was clearly useless.

Before he would be able to gain the corner of Nassau street it was ten chances to one that he would receive a bullet in his back.

It was an occasion which demanded rapid thought, and still more rapid action.

Before the door of the building next adjoining the saloon, close to the sidewalk, stood a large wooden ashbox with a cover.

It was quite large enough to admit a man of Joe Barkley's build, providing it proved to be empty.

Joe sprang toward the ashbox and raised the cover.

It was about one-third full.

Without an instant's hesitation he crawled into it and dropped the cover, scarce two seconds elapsing before the men, emerging from the saloon and alley, dashed past, their boot-heels ringing on the icy stones.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A STRANGE WELCOME.

"You must descend those stairs, Miss Livingston."

"Gentlemen, I am in your hands. I am but a woman. I can offer no resistance. I implore you to respect my sex, to remember that I am a Livingston and a Virginian, that I am summoned to my father's dying bed."

"You need feel no fear, Miss Livingston," said the shrouded figure who now led the way down the steps beneath the pulpit of the old red church. "As for your father, you need have no alarm on that score either. General Livingston is not going to die just yet."

Katherine attempted no reply.

The stairs were too narrow to permit her conductor to still retain his hold on her arm, and as he dropped behind there seemed to remain no alternative but to follow the person ahead of her down the steps.

The descent was a short one.

At the foot of the steps the man in advance again produced his lantern, opened a door, and led the way into one of those caverns in which the mountains of Virginia abound.

There was not light enough to see the beauties of the cavern, the pendant stalactites with their wonderful shapes, the Gothic arches, and the tall stalagmites which rose from the floor on every side.

Nor would Katherine have been allowed to tarry even had



she so desired, for the man behind now resumed his hold on her arm, and hurried her along over the uneven surface of the cave.

For fully half an hour their journey continued.

Then, passing through a narrow opening, they found themselves in the midst of a thick forest of pines.

Here the lantern was again secreted, and the man in advance stepped to the young girl's side.

"My friend here wishes to go back, Miss Livingston," he said. "Can I rely upon your honor to make me no trouble if we continue on our journey to Ballentyne Hall alone?"

"I am forced to accompany you, sir, and I shall cause no unnecessary trouble. The appeal to my honor comes with poor grace from one who is ashamed to show his face.

"Thank you. Perhaps the reproof is not undeserved, nevertheless I shall not reveal myself—at least, not yet."

"You are taking me to Ballentyne Hall?"

"I assure you I am."

"Very well, then, I will follow you quietly. I have no more to say."

Evidently it was enough, for the second shrouded figure now returned to the cave, leaving Katherine and her mysterious conductor to pursue their way alone.

It lay through the pine forest, and proved to be a steep ascent.

Long before it was over the storm had passed, and the moon was shining brightly when they emerged at length within a stone's throw of the gray house on the rock.

The masked man seemed to understand the lay of the land perfectly.

Avoiding the door by which Joe Barkley had entered, he passed around the house to the left and tapped lightly upon a smaller door, which opened from the side of the mansion upon a little porch.

"Are you satisfied now, Miss Livingston?" he asked. "You recognize your old home—Ballentyne Hall?"

"I do; and as my memory goes back to former days I begin to think I recognize your voice."

"Indeed! And who do you think I am?"

"I believe you to be Colonel Carver, my mother's cousin, who used to live at the Grange at the foot of the rock."

The man laughed softly.

"You have got a good memory, girl. It is many years since you saw Colonel Carver—you were then but a little child. Ah! those were the happy, peaceful times. Now all is changed. These are sad days for Old Virginia—sad days; sad days."

His reflections were interrupted by the opening of the door.

It was the dumb negro, Pete, who had answered their summons.

He stood holding a candle in one hand, a great knotted club in the other, and was staring straight ahead.

No sooner had he caught sight of Katherine Livingston than a peculiar sound escaped his lips.

It was such a sound as a dog would make when overjoyed after a long absence to see its master.

He dropped the club, and seizing Katherine's hand, kissed it again and again.

Tears sprang to the young girl's eyes.

"Why, this is Pete," she said, resting her hand on the negro's head. "Poor dumb Pete! Some one is glad to see me again at the old home, it seems."

"Others than Pete are ready to welcome you, daughter," spoke a deep voice further back in the hall.

Then as her masked conductor softly closed the door behind them, a tall, heavily-bearded gentleman of military air strode toward Katherine and clasped her in his arms.

"Father! Can it be possible? You are not dying?"

"Not yet, Kate, not yet," answered the man, rather thickly.

"I was sick, but I am now better. Welcome home, daughter! You'll find things changed, yet, nevertheless, welcome home!"

His breath smelt strongly of liquor, and there was something about his manner which caused Katherine to shudder and draw back.

Yet it was certainly General Livingston, her stepfather.

Though many years had elapsed since she had seen him, his features were too firmly impressed on her memory to admit of a mistake.

The man seemed to divine her thoughts and to resent them.

"What ails you?" he asked, roughly, "and how is it that you come here after this fashion instead of by the conveyance I sent to meet you at the train?"

Katherine told her story.

While she spoke the masked man pushed by them and disappeared.

General Livingston listened attentively, giving vent to a surprised ejaculation now and then.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed, when that part of the girl's story relating to the tragedy on the mountain road was told. "You don't mean to say that Walsingham came with you, after all, and that he is dead?"

"It is just as I tell you, sir. After the accident happened I regained control of the horses and drove to the old red church. There I was surrounded by masked men, one of whom escorted me here by way of a secret passage beneath the pulpit leading into a cave."

"Yes—yes. Those are the 'regulators.' They have work to-night, and met in the church. There will be one traitorous Virginian and a Union spy less before morning dawns. Poor Walsingham! Do you suppose he is dead?"

"I fear so. But why do we stand here? This is a strange welcome to my own house, father—a strange welcome indeed."

"Does it seem so? Well, I admit it; but these are strange days. There must have been a mistake made in some way. Didn't you see Pete at the station?"

"No; I was frightened and saw nothing."

"Frightened at what?"

"To tell the truth, sir, I began to fear that I was to become the victim of treachery. Colonel Walsingham met a person on the station platform, and spoke with him. I heard Arthur Heming's name mentioned, and——"

"Heming! You did?"

"I am sure of it. Father, you must know that I can never marry Arthur Heming."

"Come, Kate!" exclaimed General Livingston, grasping her arm roughly. "Come with me."

He led her through the dark hall to a door which he opened.

It disclosed a room of moderate size, brilliantly lighted.

There was a table in the center of the room, upon which stood decanters and glasses.

The atmosphere was so blue that Katherine could scarcely distinguish the forms of a number of men, all of whom appeared to be more or less intoxicated, sitting around the table talking and laughing over their wine and cigars.

"Father, I cannot enter here!" breathed the frightened girl, drawing back.

"Can't! What's the reason you can't? I say, Heming, I've brought you your bride."

And, in spite of her feeble attempt at resistance, General Livingston forced his stepdaughter into the room.

## CHAPTER XII.

### STUDYING THE LETTER.

The time is morning, the day is Thursday, the place the old stone mansion occupied by the United States secret service in New York city, on lower Broadway.



At a little past nine o'clock Joe Barkley, the young detective, presented himself at Lieutenant Marsden's door and knocked.

The ruse of the detective had proved successful on the previous night, and the ash-box a friend in need.

No sooner had the footsteps of his pursuers passed beyond hearing than Joe crept out, hurried down Ann street to William, and thence by Beekman street made the best of his way to his room uptown.

He was in no shape to follow up the discovery he had made, and, of course, had no evidence against the card-players upon which he could have held them, even if able to effect their arrest.

What he did do was to quietly turn into bed and gain needed sleep, and now upon the following morning hasten to the office of his superior, and lay before him the details of his movements since the day he left New York.

Lieutenant Marsden heard him patiently until the end.

"I'm very sorry I failed, Mr. Marsden."

"Barkley, so am I, but you need not be discouraged; the best of us fail at times. It was a lucky thing you did not go to that farmhouse."

"Why so?"

"Because, according to a dispatch which I have just received, a band of masked raiders appeared suddenly before the house that night, took the spy and hanged him, together with the farmer, burning the house to the ground."

"Is it possible? Precisely as they served Sidney Peterson."

"You see what you escaped. In some manner the secret must have reached the ears of the Confederates. After all, I shouldn't wonder if that night's adventure of yours proved most important. Of course, you have the letters about you. Let me see them, if you please."

Joe produced the letters.

As will be remembered, the one in the woman's handwriting read as follows:

"At the risk of life itself this is placed in your hands. If you desire to save the city of New York from destruction, hasten back without delay and lay the whole matter before the police."

"That is plain, ominously plain," said the lieutenant, "and was evidently written by a lover of the Union cause. Now for your rebus. Well, this is a puzzler. Let me see—let me see."

The second letter was the one containing the rows of figures which had so puzzled the detective.

Lieutenant Marsden studied the rows of figures long and earnestly.

"Have you given it any thought, Barkley?" he asked at length.

"Have I? I should say I had. I was up at daylight and have been puzzling my brains over the confounded thing ever since."

"And can make nothing out of it?"

"Not a thing. When I was a boy at school I used to think myself 'some' on puzzles and rebuses, too."

"Do you know what I think, Barkley?"

"What?"

"That your beautiful young lady who made her way to your bedside in so singular and so romantic a manner never saw this thing at all. That she thought it contained an important and more intelligible communication addressed on the inside of the envelope to some person in New York deep in this supposed plot to lay our city in ashes."

"It is easy to theorize, sir. I make it a rule to waste no time that way. What we require in this matter are cold facts."

"Perhaps, as you suggested a while ago, it was only a trick

to get you out of the neighborhood by some Southern sympathizer who guessed your errand," mused the lieutenant.

"It would have been just as easy to have fixed me in some way while I slept, or to have hanged me as they did Peterson and the spy."

"But surely you do not believe in any supernatural agency in this matter, Barkley? You can't be so soft as that."

"I know what I saw, Mr. Marsden."

"Now, come; the beautiful girl in your room is all very well. This cipher is positive proof that there is something in that; but the ghostly forms at the windows, the dancers in the hall—'twon't do, Barkley. You thought you saw them, but it was an optical delusion—it won't go down with me."

"Here, let me see that thing again," answered Joe, not a little nettled at having so strong a suspicion thrown on his common sense as the lieutenant's words seemed to imply. "It is no use to discuss the ghost question any longer. If there's anything in that piece of paper, I'm bound to have it out."

For a long time Joe Barkley studied the paper in silence.

"These figures stand for letters," he said at length.

"Undoubtedly," replied the lieutenant.

"They are not the letters of the alphabet in regular succession, taken either backward or forward. I've tried both ways, and can make no sense."

"Probably they are the letters of some sentence?"

"That can't be; if it were they would be numbered in regular order, which is just what they ain't. In these hyphenated figures lie the secret. What can they mean?"

The next ten minutes was spent in twisting the figures about in accordance with various theories.

Suddenly Joe exclaimed again.

"Well, what now?" asked Lieutenant Marsden.

"Why, I've made a discovery. The figure 9 is the only one which occurs twice in succession. It must, therefore, be one of the doubling vowels—either e or o."

"You forget these three 4s," said the lieutenant.

"No, I don't. I've put them down for a street number long ago. Don't you see they are the only figures which have no commas following them—I know I'm right."

"Well, well?"

"Now, assuming that the figure 9 represents a doubling vowel, the question arises whether that vowel is e or o. I say it must be e on account of the frequency of its occurrence, and— By George, here's something else."

"Well, what now?"

"13 must be another vowel—it occurs four times and is never hyphenated. I'm getting there, Mr. Marsden, I'm certainly getting there. I'm going to call 13 the vowel a."

"How will that help you? I must confess I am as much in the dark as ever."

"Why, 13 is the half of 26, the number of letters in the alphabet. Suppose now, this system begins to number in the middle, we'll say at M. That would make a the 13th letter, and e the 9th. Assuming that the hyphenated figures preceded by 1 represent the letters following M, then z would be 1-13, according to the plan, and— Here, give me a clean sheet of paper, quick! I've got it as sure as you live."

Lieutenant Marsden handed him the paper, upon which Joe Barkley jotted down the letters of the alphabet, with the numbers according to his system beneath, M being underlined by the figure 1, N by 1-1, the other following in regular order down to 13 and 1-13.

"Now, call them off while I write," said Joe.

Lieutenant Marsden took up the letter and began with 1-7. Joe on his paper wrote the letter T.

"6," said the lieutenant.

Joe wrote H.

"1-8."



Down on the paper went U.

"1-5."

"R," called Joe.

"1-6."

"S."

"10."

"D."

"13."

"1-12."

"Y. That makes a word. It's 'Thursday.' Mr. Marsden, the riddle is solved."

With breathless haste Lieutenant Marsden called the remaining figures contained in the letter, while Joe Barkley jotted them down on his sheet.

"Eureka!" cried the detective, springing to his feet. "Here we have it! Listen to this:

"Thursday 444 at midnight man with green handkerchief the word is Richmond."

### CHAPTER XIII.

444.

"444 at midnight."

Thus began the cipher dispatch brought by Detective Joe Barkley from the gray house on the rock.

To-day the sentence would be meaningless.

"444 what street?" would be the question instantly asked, and had the cipher dispatch been interpreted ten years later, it is doubtful if a dozen persons would have been found to explain exactly what it meant.

There was no doubt in Joe Barkley's mind, however, as to the particular street intended to be understood as following the figures 444.

The street was Broadway.

In the year 1864 the 444 number was famous as the designation of the first, and in many respects most popular, variety entertainment which ever existed in the city of New York.

444 was famous far and near.

444 was then the home of minstrelsy, the cradle of those ancient jokes now known as "chestnuts," which have been going the rounds ever since.

444 was the school from which graduated such noted variety artists as Tony Pastor, Johnny Wild, Charley White, and others just as famous long since dead.

"Thursday 444 at midnight man with green handkerchief the word is Richmond."

The deciphering of the letter contained in the inclosure placed on his pillow showed Joe Barkley plainly enough the work he had to do.

That day was Thursday.

At midnight, then, he must be at 444, ready for his perilous task.

"Are you not afraid to try it?" asked Lieutenant Marsden. "You haven't the faintest idea who you are going to meet, or what is expected of you. Hadn't I better detail the job to an older hand, or at least send an officer with you in disguise?"

"If you do I shall instantly write my resignation," had been the spirited reply of the young detective. "I shall go to 444 at midnight, Mr. Marsden, and what is more, I shall go alone."

And Joe Barkley did it.

At exactly a quarter of twelve that night a slim, tow-headed Southerner, with a red goatee, a la the "corncracker," looking for all the world like a North Carolina "tar heel" fresh from the turpentine forests, but comfortably dressed withal, presented his bit of pasteboard to the ticket-taker at 444, and

forced his way among the crowd, looking to the right and left as though seeking a seat.

The entertainment was then at its height, for in those days the frequenters of variety entertainments never thought they had their money's worth unless the "show kept in" until at least one o'clock.

A band of negro minstrels occupied the stage, which was simply a raised platform at the end of a long and narrow room.

One of this number had been singing a popular song of the day, which just as the Southerner entered was being accompanied by a number of young feminine beauties in gauze apparel, each frantically waving the flag of the Union while the audience shouted the chorus.

Such was the custom at 444 at that time.

The North Carolinian pushed his way to a place as near the front as possible—reserved seats there were none—and dropping upon the wooden bench, proceeded to follow the general example and light a cigar.

It was secret service detective Joe Barkley.

The trying time had almost come.

The day was Thursday, it lacked but a few moments of midnight.

Suppose he met a man with a green handkerchief, what was he to say to him?

Would it be possible for one utterly uninformed concerning the supposed plot to carry out the deception?

It was a doubtful case.

The slightest show of hesitation, an unfortunately chosen word, might at any moment arouse suspicion, and then—why, then he might as well never have interpreted the cipher dispatch at all.

As he sat there smoking Joe looked slowly and cautiously at each face about him, occasionally turning and bestowing a hasty glance upon those behind.

Certainly the audience was not a silent one, but it displayed the masculine fashions of the day in great variety.

Then it was not the custom to display one's handkerchief from the side coat pocket.

Joe was not able to discover a handkerchief of any sort, save a red bandanna tied round the neck of a collarless youth who sat directly in front of himself.

He looked also for the faces of the four Virginians seen by him the night before behind the green shutter of the Ann street saloon.

More than any other one thing he dreaded their presence.

To his intense relief, these men were nowhere to be seen. Meanwhile, the entertainment progressed fast and furiously.

Joe looked at his watch in a nervous tremor.

It now lacked one minute of twelve.

Would the man with the green handkerchief make his presence known?

The next two minutes would show.

At that instant one of the end men began:

"Mr. Smiff,"—addressing the middle man—"why is my yaller dog like Jeff Davis?"

"Really, Julius, I cannot inform you. Why is your yallow dog like the rebel president?"

"Well, Mr. Smiff," replied Bones, "my yaller dog is like Jeff Davis becaze——"

The answer was lost to all except those who sat close to the stage.

At that instant a man seated off to the left of the detective suddenly blew his nose with a trumpet-like blast which awakened the echoes of the smoky hall, drowning all other sound.

"If the gentleman wants to practice on the French horn he had better step up here on the stage so we can all hear



him!" cried the ready-witted middle man, looking toward the offender.

A general laugh followed.

Cries of "bounce him!" "hustle him out!" etc., resounded through the hall.

Of course all eyes were directed toward the disturber.

He was a tall, smoothly-shaved man of some forty years, plainly dressed after the fashion of the day.

Joe Barkley looked toward him among the rest.

He seemed alike oblivious to the sarcasm of the middle man or the jeers of the crowd.

He was still using his handkerchief in so public a fashion that everyone could see it.

The heart of the young detective beat furiously as he now perceived that the handkerchief was a light pea-green.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### AUNT NANCY'S REVELATION.

A dead silence followed the coarse speech of General Livingston as he forced rather than led his step-daughter to the center of the room.

The men about the table set down their glasses and removed their cigars from their lips.

It was evident that they were one and all quite as much taken aback as Katherine herself.

"Well, what's the matter?" blurted out the officer, thickly. "Are you all struck dumb at the sight of my pretty daughter? You, in particular, Arthur Heming—why don't you say something? I tell you again this is Kate, your future wife."

Immediately a young, and, though handsome, somewhat dissipated-looking man, arose from among those about the table, and walked unsteadily toward the trembling girl.

"Shame on you, general!" he exclaimed. "You don't know what you are about. Miss Livingston, allow me to escort you from the room."

Now under no other circumstances would Katherine Livingston have consented to accept the escort of Arthur Heming.

She had known this man from her earliest infancy, and was fully aware of his reckless, dissipated character.

The relation between the pair was most peculiar.

Arthur Heming was her cousin, and, though a Virginian by birth, had, like herself, been educated in the North.

While Katherine was heiress of Ballentyne Hall and the wild land around it—an estate of no great value even in times of peace, and now nearly worthless—Arthur Heming was penniless, though a prospective heir to property of great value in the city of New York, providing he could persuade Miss Livingston to become his wife.

The circumstances were these:

A mutual uncle, a bachelor of eccentric habits, now several years deceased, had accumulated wealth in New York, and upon his death a singular provision was found in his will.

It recognized the claims of both Arthur Heming and Katherine Livingston to his estate, but bequeathed nothing to either outright. Providing they should marry before the niece attained the age of twenty-one, it became the joint inheritance of both; providing the marriage could not be brought about, it went to found an asylum for the poor insane.

It had been useless for Katherine Livingston to try to bring herself to look favorably upon a union with Arthur Heming.

Personally her cousin had been uncongenial, and the wild reckless life she knew him to have led only made matters worse.

It now lacked three months of the important date, and though Heming had persistently tried to persuade her into the union, through letters received from her stepfather, smuggled north through the Union lines, had alternately coaxed and threatened, Katherine had again and again refused to lend a favorable ear.

She felt that she had rather earn her bread by hard daily toil than to become the wife of Arthur Heming, and matters reached the pass at length when admittance to the house of the relative with whom she had been living in New York had been refused.

At this time came the summons to Ballentyne Hall, and, as she had been led to believe, to her stepfather's dying bed.

As Heming had long dwelt in New York—he had joined neither army—the last person Katherine had thought to meet in this secluded Virginia mansion was her rejected suitor.

Now she accepted his arm with a sense of gratitude, and attempting no reply to the command of her step-father to remain where she was, suffered him to lead her from the room.

Notwithstanding the fact that he had been drinking deeply, Heming still had perfect control of himself.

Hurrying Katherine through the dark passage, he opened the door of a small bedroom adjoining the apartment just left behind them.

Here, by the side of an open fire of pine-knots, an old negress sat nodding.

She awoke under the pressure of Arthur Heming's hand upon her shoulder, and stared about her in a frightened way.

"Hi, dar, Marse Arthur, what am de matter? D'ye want more drink? 'Pears to me ye've had nuff already— Lordy, Lordy! who am dis? It's never Missy Kate."

"But it is, Aunt Nancy," murmured Katherine, sinking into a chair. "Mr. Heming, I thank you. You have rendered me a service which I shall not forget."

Arthur Heming, though forced to steady himself against the bedpost, was nevertheless ready with his reply.

"Don't mention it, cousin. I—I want you to understand that this is none of my doings. Your father has been drinking—he is not himself."

Katherine bowed her head and burst into a flood of tears.

"Hi, dar! Marse Arthur," cried the negress, running toward her. "You been 'sultin' my nuss child, my pretty Missy Kate? Fo' de Lor', if you hev you'll regret it. I tell you dat flat."

"No, no, Aunt Nancy," breathed Katherine. "It was not Mr. Heming."

"Was it de ole marse? Nebber you mind him, Missy Kate, he's rousin' drunk. Dar's great goin's on at de Hall dese times. Wonder dem proud old Ballentynes can lie still in dere graves."

"I—I think I'd better leave you, cousin," stammered Heming, retreating toward the door. "Lock yourself in—don't answer, no matter who knocks. They are all drunk, but I promise you that this night I for one shall drink no more. Do not fear further insult from your father—I shall defend you with my life if necessary. Nance, I'll wring your black neck if you open this door to anyone—do you hear?"

He was gone in the instant.

His footsteps had scarce died away in the passage before Aunt Nancy had stolen toward the door and turned the key.

"Missy Kate, Missy Kate, what is it? Tell ole nuss all about it, honey. Tell her; 'twill do ye good."

And Katherine did so.

Into the willing ears of Aunt Nancy she poured her tale.

Somewhat to her surprise the negress refrained from comments, but listened in deep attention to every word she said.



Then drawing nearer and dropping her voice to a low whisper, she asked:

"Missy Kate, I wants to ax ye one question' an' I wants you to swar 'fo' de Lord dat you tell yer ole aunty de trufe. Be ye fo' de Norf or de Souf?"

"My sympathies have ever been on the side of the Union, Aunt Nancy, though I fear it is scarcely safe to breathe it even here in my own house."

"You swar it, Missy Kate?"

"Nancy, can you not believe me?"

"Culled folks don't belebe not'ing white folks tells 'em dese times. Don't tink I stay here caze I want ter, Missy Kate. I'd been off after de 'mancipation only my rheumatiz is too bad an' I'm too ole. Swar dat de adversary he git you if you ain't tellin' ole nuss de trufe."

"I swear it if it will please you, Aunt Nancy. Since my relatives are one and all Confederates, it does not become me to talk much about these matters, but I swear to you now that my heart is ever with the North."

The old negress clasped her hands with an expression of joy.

"I knowed it! I knowed it!" she whispered. "I knowed my pretty nuss chile wouldn't go agin de culled folks. Missy Kate, dese am ebil times. Do you know what's goin' on in yonder room?"

"I'm sure I don't, Aunt Nancy."

"Den I'll tole ye, chile. Bring yer ear close to ole missus' mouf, for de very walls may hear us. Missy Kate, what's brung ole marse to de hall, and Marse Arthur Heming, an' Marse Gen'l Carver, an' all de res' on 'em, is to concoct a debil's scheme to burn down de great city ob New York."

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE FACE AT THE WINDOW.

"Now is your time, Joe Barkley! Show yourself a man," whispered the young detective to himself, and he arose, shot a meaning glance toward the owner of the green handkerchief, and elbowing his way through the somewhat turbulent audience which filled the hall at "444," passed out into the street.

He knew as well as he could know anything that he would be followed.

The eye of the individual of the green hankerchief had been upon him as he arose—his meaning glance had been returned.

Gaining the front of the theater, Joe Barkley stepped to the curb, and in the shadow of the billboard waited.

Now that he was actually in for it he was not so nervous; in fact, as the minutes passed, he found himself growing quite calm.

He kept his eyes fixed upon the lobby of the theater, as a matter of course, and was presently rewarded by seeing the "green handkerchief" come sauntering out carelessly. He paused at the door to light a cigar, at the same time sending wary glances up and down the street.

Now Joe obtained a good look at him.

He was not a bad-looking person.

As already mentioned, he was tall, about forty, and had a florid, smoothly shaven face. There was nothing about him to indicate the Southerner, and the detective mentally put him down for a resident of New York.

Should he advance himself or wait for an advance from the stranger?

It was a ticklish question.

As everything he did that night must be done in the dark, Joe resolved to let all moves come from the enemy.

He accordingly stepped out upon the sidewalk and sauntered slowly past the "green handkerchief," as he did so throwing toward him the meaning glance again.

He had not gone ten steps from the entrance to "444" before the stranger was at his side.

"Good-evening, friend."

The voice was coarse and somewhat disagreeable, although the tone employed was intended to be the blandest of the bland.

"Evenin', stranger," replied Joe, with as marked a Southern emphasis as he could assume.

"What's the good word?" demanded the "green handkerchief," carelessly—they had not paused in their walk.

"Richmond," replied Joe, promptly.

"Will never be Uncle Sam's," was the instant answer, and before Joe fairly realized what he was about the man had seized his hand and grasped it with the warmth of an old friend.

"Happy—most happy to meet you, sir," he said. "You come from General Livingston, I suppose?"

"Yes, from General Livingston."

"How is the general?"

"He was well when I left Ballentyne Hall," replied Joe, on a desperate venture.

The shot told.

From that instant his companion seemed to throw off all reserve.

"So you have just come from the Hall?"

"Oh, yes. I left Dugdale yesterday morning."

"And I Richmond forty-eight hours before you. President Davis is delighted with our plan. Did you bring the money?"

"No."

"Confound it all! What do you people mean? This scheme can't be carried out without money. The president has none to give, and Livingston promised when I left him in Richmond——"

Here the speaker seemed seized with some sudden suspicion, for he stopped short in his speech and began looking at Joe in a curious way.

Something must be done and quickly—that was evident.

"The money will be on hand to-morrow," said Joe, desperately. "I was afraid to bring it myself—one never can tell what may happen. We thought it safer to let Pete, the dummy, do the carrying, and——"

"All right—all right!" exclaimed the other, with a sigh of relief. "Do you know I almost began to suspect you, till you mentioned Pete, the dummy? By the way, we've not been introduced yet. I'm Major Pontifex, of New Orleans."

"And my name is Captain Tomlinson. I'm from Raleigh," was the detective's quick response.

"Glad to meet you, captain. I rather expected to see Jennings. That's why I was a trifle suspicious, don't you see? By the way, these are dry times, and we've got to talk matters over. 'Tain't safe to breathe a word in the street here—one can't tell how close the civil service detectives are to a fellow. I know a little snuggery over on the Bowery. Suppose we postpone further discussion till we've adjourned there and had some refreshments?"

Joe was agreeable to anything.

If his words were to be believed, a little good whisky was precisely the thing he was pining for just then.

During the walk to the Bowery the conversation was upon general topics, the detective skillfully steering around all dangerous questions, and abusing the "Ankees all he possibly could.

Upon reaching the Bowery Major Pontifex led the way to the corner of Hester street, and entered a low frame building with a saloon upon the ground floor.



He passed directly through the saloon and into a rear room with the air of one familiar with the premises, and touching a bell, ordered refreshments and cigars.

Not until they had drunk to the success of the mysterious scheme did the conversation begin.

The matter was broached by Joe Barkley.

Now was his one great opportunity to display himself.

That he was resolved not to neglect it need not be said.

Carefully assuring himself that the door had closed behind the waiter, he came back to the table, and leaning his elbows upon it, said in a meaning whisper:

"Now, then, major, to business. How long is this city going to stand?"

The shot told again.

"Not an hour longer than I can help, captain. See here. I've got the authority signed by President Davis himself. It gives us absolute permission to lay New York in ashes. Each member of our little company is to receive a thousand acres of land and ten thousand dollars in cash at the successful termination of the war. This time we shall not fail."

Thereupon Major Pontifex drew from his inside pocket an official-looking parchment, bearing the great seal of the Confederacy, and spread it out on the table before Joe Barkley's astonished eyes.

The document was a written one, and laid upon the "loyal citizens," Edward Pontifex, Ballentyne Livingston, Arthur Heming, and a number of other persons absolute commands to burn the city of New York at the earliest moment the details of the plan could be arranged.

Joe Barkley read the important document through from beginning to end.

As he sat he faced the window opening upon Hester street, while Major Pontifex, on the opposite side of the table, had his back turned toward it, as a matter of course.

The window was shielded on the outside by an ordinary blind, with movable slats.

Just as Joe Barkley was about to lay down the document he chanced to raise his eyes.

To his intense disturbance he beheld as plainly as he had ever seen anything Pete, the dummy, with his face pressed close to the turned slats, peering in through the blinds.

Here was a sudden turning of tables.

It was certainly the dumb negro.

He was giving Joe Barkley a taste of his own game.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### KATHERINE LIVINGSTON TAKES A HAND IN THE GAME.

"Aunt Nancy! Aunt Nancy! You cannot mean it. You must be dreaming!"

"No dream 'bout it, chile. Hain't been tendin' 'round dem drunkards in t'other room dere for nuthin'. Tell you, honey, dat am de gospel truth. Dey's fixed de fing, dey's got a hull

lot of 'fernally masheens in de cellar what dey gwine to yuse to blow up de city of New York with. Don't I know? Hi, dar! Talk to me! Hain't my son, poor dumb Pete, been used as a tool for dem wretches? Guess yes. Dey's sent him to York repeatedly, I say. Nev' you mind, he fool de debbil yit, if he am dumb. But 'scuse me, Missy Kate, I e'en-a-most forgot Mass' Gen'l Livingston's yo' father."

"I disown him, Aunt Nancy," breathed Katherine Livingston. "The accident of his marrying my mother don't give him sufficient claim on me to make it my duty to forgive the insult he has offered this night. Aunt Nancy, I am heart and soul for the Union cause. Tell me about this plot to burn New York. Can nothing be done to frustrate it?"

"Dunno, chile, dunno. Spec's as how matters an' t'ings can't be much wuss frustrated dan dey am just dis present time."

"Has General Livingston been sick?"

"Rum sick, Missy. Nothing else."

"How long since he came to the Hall?"

"Tree weeks; mebbe four. I forgit."

"But of course his presence here is not generally known. Ballentyne Hall is within the Union lines."

"Yo' right, chile. It's a dead secret. Dey've kept in de wes' wing wid de rest ob de house shut up, and dey've been comin' an' goin' an' goin' an' comin', totin' 'fernally masheens up de mountain what's sent all de way from Richmond. Mass Jeff Davis he make 'em himself, I specs. All dey want now's de money to get 'em to New York, an' carry out dere wicked game."

Katherine Livingston could not repress a shudder.

"Do yo' know how dey specs to get dat money, chile?"

"No."

"Dey's 'ticed yo' here fo' to marry yo' to Mass Arthur Heming, so's you two can 'herit dat dar fortune under your uncle's will."

"Aunt Nancy!"

"It's de trufe, Miss Kate. Fo' de Lor' it's de trufe. I hain't been a-listenin' at keyholes, a-spyin' an' a-snoopin', a-prewaricatin' an' a-lyin' fo nuffin dese las' two weeks, an' perlinin my mortal soul in doin' it. I've hearn all about it. Dey take Aunt Nancy for a fool, an' dat's whar dey's mistaken. Dey want money an' dey's got to have it. Dere's a Jew man in York what's promised to 'vance it to Marse Arthur Heming when he sees de marriage 'stiffikit certifying dat you two's man and wife."

Katherine Livingston sprang to her feet pale and trembling.

"I must leave this place," she breathed. "I must leave it at once."

"Hi, dar! How's you goin' ter do it, honey? Dey's got dar eye on you, be sure ob dat. 'Sides, Mass Kinnicutt, de old oberseer's allus on de watch fo' who comes an' who goes. He'll loose de bloodhounds on you if you 'tempts to 'scape."

"But, Aunt Nancy, some one must warn New York against the fate these wicked men have designed for her. For myself, I'd rather jump off the cliff than marry Arthur Heming. I shall never be his bride, living! Oh, Aunt Nancy! this is terrible! What shall we do?"



The face of the old colored woman assumed a look of keen intelligence.

She arose, crept toward the door, and listened for a moment, returning to Miss Livingston's side.

"Missy Kate," she whispered, "I'se been a-prayin' on my bended knees to the good Lord to send help to dose poor people in York. I'se prayed till my knees is sore. To-night he's done it, Missy Kate. De good Lor's done heard me. Some hocus pocus mistake about yer comin' up from de station brung a Union officer instead; I don' 'fess to understand it. It's de Lor's doin's. But he come, anyhow, dis officer. Why dey not kill him I can't tell. He was cotched in de storm, an' now he's 'sleep in bed up in de blue room, whar your poor mammy died."

"Well, well, Nancy, and what good will that do us?"

"Look heah, chile! Don' yo' go fo' to question the doin's of de Lor'!"

And the negress took from her pocket a sealed letter.

"Dat's what Mass General Livingston give to my boy Pete to take to York to-morrow mornin' fust thing. I coaxed it frum Pete an' guv him a sheet of blank paper stuck in a 'velope instid. I was goin' to give dis to de officer, but he's done gone and locked his door on de inside."

For several moments Katherine Livingston stood in deep thought.

"Aunt Nancy," she said, at length, "you are right. This letter must be given to the Union officer with a note of warning. I can enter that room if you cannot. The red room, which used to be my chamber—can we reach it without attracting my step-father's attention?"

"Can't do it while dey's in de next room, Missy Kate. De red room is in de wes' wing right ober der heads. De stairs go up from dat ar room. You know dat well 'nuff."

"Then we must wait until they are through with their orgies, Aunt Nancy. God grant, meanwhile, they may leave us alone."

The hours passed.

Waiting, listening, the two women, one old, black and wrinkled, the other young and surpassing beautiful, sat conversing in whispers before the dying fire.

It was almost morning before unsteady steps in the passage told them that the time had come.

Doors opened and shut, voices were heard talking in suppressed whispers, then at last these sounds died away and all was still.

"Open the door, Aunt Nancy!"

The negress complied.

Like a spirit, Katherine Livingstone glided into the passage and softly opened the door of the adjoining room.

The room was empty at last.

Groping her way in the darkness, she now passed up a flight of stairs into a chamber above.

Then from the folds of her dress she produced a taper, lighted it, and crept toward an oaken panel at one end of the room.

The room was empty at last.

Here she paused, and running her hand along the surface of the panel, touched some hidden spring.

Instantly the panel flew back, revealing a narrow passage.

"Thank God! My memory still serves me in spite of the lapse of years!" breathed the girl.

She entered the passage. The panel closed behind her.

Two minutes later and Katherine Livingston stood in that room again, trembling like a leaf.

The deed was done.

The sealed letter had been placed upon Joe Barkley's pillow, as we have already seen.

Carefully extinguishing the taper, Katherine started on her return.

She had descended the stairs and advanced several feet across the room below, when the sudden opening of the door brought her to a halt.

Before her stood General Livingston, her step-father, swaying from side to side at the imminent risk of dropping a candle which he held with unsteady hand.

"Kate! Girl! In Satan's name what brings you here?" he asked, thickly. "I've been looking for you everywhere. They've gone to fetch the parson. Get your wedding togs ready, if you can find any. By sunrise you must be Hemming's bride."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### OUTWITTED.

It was certainly Pete the dummy.

The face of the young negro had by this time become too firmly impressed upon Joe Barkley's memory to admit of mistake.

He was peering between the slats of the window blinds into the back room behind the Hester street saloon, his eyes fixed on the detective's face.

"What's the matter?" demanded Major Pontifex, who had been watching Joe narrowly.

"Matter—nothing. Why do you ask? I have finished reading this commission. It certainly gives us all the authority we want for our work. Come, let's take another drink."

Joe Barkley spoke quietly and in his usual tone.

His manner was perfectly calm and collected, despite of the belief that was momentarily growing on him that at any instant the door might open and the Virginians who had chased him on the previous night from the saloon on Ann street enter the room.

Then as he ventured to raise his eyes to the window again he saw that the face of Pete the dummy had disappeared.

What could it mean?

Had all his movements been followed?

Certainly it looked so.

There was no telling at what moment his enemies might show their hand.



His first idea was to spring upon Major Pontifex and place him under arrest while there was yet time.

Despite the superior physical powers of the man, Joe would not have hesitated to do this had it not been for the certain consequences which must grow out of so precipitate a move.

Once arrest Major Pontifex, and although the plot to burn New York might thereby be frustrated, all hope of discovering the plotters and bringing them to justice might as well be abandoned at once.

Joe Barkley was determined to accomplish both these things.

He had set out to do it, and he would.

Therefore, instead of displaying in the slightest degree the agitation he felt, he calmly laid the document on the table, and taking up the bottle, poured out the drinks.

"Come," said Major Pontifex, smacking his lips, "that goes to the right spot. Do you know, captain, good whisky is getting scarce in the South—confoundedly scarce. It does a fellow good to get a decent nip again. Now to business. When you were at Ballentyne Hall did General Livingston show you the infernal machines?"

"No," answered Joe, slowly, "he did not. The fact is, I arrived at the Hall late in the evening, and the general and all hands had been imbibing rather too freely. I was obliged to leave by the early train. And in the morning there was no time."

"That's Livingston all over," exclaimed the Southerner. "His everlasting guzzling will prove fatal to our plan if we don't look out. Take another nip, captain? Yes? Well, here's a go. By George, that's good whisky—the best I've tasted in a year!"

Good or bad, the whisky had certainly begun to tell on Major Pontifex.

It loosened his tongue, and seemed to dispel from his mind any lingering suspicion of his companion, which until now he might have entertained.

Joe saw this.

His own potations had been more moderate than those of the major.

In making out this General Livingston a drunkard he had scored one point, it seemed, and Joe determined to make it serve his purpose again.

Meanwhile his eyes constantly wandered toward the door, in expectation of seeing the Virginians enter at any moment, but time passed and they still remained undisturbed.

"The fact is, major, General Livingston was too far gone to explain matters as he ought to have done. When I saw him in Richmond it was arranged that the full details of the plot should be disclosed to me at Ballentyne Hall. He didn't do it because he was in no condition. He simply gave me the instructions to meet you in the secret cipher, and told me to tell you that the money would be forthcoming as soon as he could perfect arrangements. He didn't even disclose the names of those interested with us except Mr. Heming's, of course. So you see how ignorant I am."

All the old suspicious look had returned to the face of Major Pontifex during this speech.

"I call that a confoundedly bungling way to do business," he said, slowly. "What in thunder is the use in Livingston's sending me a man like you?"

Joe shrugged his shoulders.

"I went to Ballentyne Hall in accordance with orders," was all he said.

After a few moments of exasperating silence Major Pontifex spoke again.

"Let's see the cipher letter Livingston gave you."

Joe handed out the letter.

The major scanned it narrowly, then spreading it out on the table between them—the commission signed by Jefferson Davis had been restored to its former concealment about his person some time before.

"Let's see you read that thing," he now said, abruptly.

Without the slightest hesitation Joe Barkley picked up the letter and read:

"Thursday, 444, at midnight. Man with green handkerchief. The word is Richmond."

Major Pontifex heaved a sigh of relief.

"Do you know," he said, leaning across the table confidentially, "I had almost begun to doubt you, captain, but I see now you are all right. It is more of Livingston's infernal slipshod work. I told President Davis that he would make a botch of the affair when he agreed to bring the infernal machines north by the way of the woods and Ballentyne Hall, but I was not believed. Livingston promised to fix up a marriage between his step-daughter and Heming, which was to bring us all the money we needed. Had the girl arrived at the Hall when you left?"

"No."

Though his lips framed an answer, in his heart Joe Barkley gave one of quite another sort.

He saw it all.

The girl he had spoken with at the Dugdale station, the beautiful creature to whom he owed all the knowledge of the affair he possessed, was certainly the person referred to by Major Pontifex now.

"It's deuced strange," mused the major. "She hates Heming, I'm told; but there's a big estate coming to them in case they marry. Livingston sent her a decoy letter to entice her to the Hall, and said he should marry her off whether or no, and furthermore that Heming would be back here with the marriage certificate, which some money lender or other was going to advance on by Thursday night—that's to-night—don't you see? Thought either Heming or my friend Jennings would certainly meet me, but instead it's you."

"I was about to observe when you interrupted me," said Joe, slowly, "that the object in sending me North was to tell you that General Livingston had not been able to arrange the marriage quite as soon as he expected. He instructed me to say to you that this day week Heming would appear at 444, where we met to-night, prepared to place sufficient money in your hands to carry out our scheme."

Major Pontifex stared.



He would have stared the harder had he known that every word of Joe Barkley's reply had been drawn from his own disclosures.

"Why in thunder didn't you tell me so in the first place?" he asked.

"Well, to tell the truth, I had my own suspicions of you, major. One can't be too careful, you know. As you were saying a while ago, the U. S. Secret Service detectives may be at our elbow when we least expect it. Now that we understand one another, however, we may talk more freely. We have a week to wait and may as well enjoy ourselves. I'm a stranger in New York myself. Perhaps you'll have the kindness to show me the town."

"Certainly, certainly, captain! Shall we begin to-night?"

"Suppose we make it to-morrow night. I'm rather fatigued after my long journey. By the way, are any of our friends here in New York just now?"

"You mean our fellow plotters?"

"Well, yes, if you like that better."

"That I don't know. It was arranged in Richmond that we were to meet to-night. General Livingston was to give them the word."

"Then, of course, none of them are in the city, since he only gave the word to me."

"It looks so. By the way, captain, since you have never seen our infernal machine, perhaps you would like to go around to my room and take a look at one I have there. It's the precise counterpart of those smuggled by Livingston through the lines and taken to Ballentyne Hall. I reckon you'll say it's a pretty cute affair."

"With all the pleasure imaginable," said Joe, rising. "Where is your room?"

"On East Broadway. I don't care to go to a hotel for fear some one might happen to recognize me. It's only a step. The good woman who keeps the lodging house little suspects who I am."

They left the saloon together and started for East Broadway.

During the walk the major talked freely, having evidently banished all suspicion at last.

His disclosures were important to the last degree, involving many prominent Southern officials in the plot.

Upon reaching the house—a plain, old-fashioned brick structure, not far from Rutgers street—Major Pontifex ascended the steps and opened the door with a key.

"Come in," he said. "Every one's abed by this time. We run no risk."

A hack rolled slowly past the house just as the door closed upon the young detective and Major Pontifex.

To this trifling circumstance Joe Barkley paid no heed.

Had he done so and delayed his entrance into the house but an instant, he might have observed that a negro lad who sat by the side of the driver on the box suddenly leaned over toward the window, at the same time making a quick gesture with his hand to some one inside the vehicle.

The hack instantly came to a halt.

From it descended the long-bearded Virginian and the man

who had spoken with Colonel Walsingham at the Dugdale station; the latter immediately beginning a rapid conversation with the negro by signs.

His communication seemed to satisfy them, for, looking carefully up and down the now deserted street, he of the long beard, leaving his companions standing at the curb, walked deliberately up the steps of the house into which had entered Joe Barkley and Major Pontifex, and rang the bell.

Meanwhile Joe and the major had ascended to a room immediately over the front parlor.

It was furnished in the usual lodging house fashion, such belongings as pertained to Major Pontifex being seemingly contained in a large carpet bag which stood in one corner.

There was some trifling delay in lighting the gas, added to which the major insisted upon Joe's smoking a cigar before inspecting the infernal machine.

The man had, in fact, just kneeled beside the carpetbag under the bed and was about to open it when there came a knock upon the door.

With a smothered imprecation Major Pontifex kicked the carpetbag under the bed and sprang in the direction of the sound.

"What's wanted?" he demanded, gruffly.

"There's a gentleman downstairs, sir, who desired me to hand you this note. I'll give it to you if you'll open the door."

The major opened the door and received the note.

As his eye hurriedly scanned its contents he glanced toward Joe Barkley in a peculiar way.

"Captain, excuse me for one moment," he said, "there's a person below who wishes to see me. What for I can't exactly make out."

He slipped out of the door and descended the stairs before Joe had time to reply.

What could this interruption mean?

Springing toward the window, Joe Barkley raised the shade and peered out into the street.

A hack stood at the corner. There was a young negro on the box.

To Joe's astonishment, for he had almost forgotten him, he saw at once that it was the dummy, Pete.

"By thunder, they've euchred me!" he breathed, at the same time springing for the door and descending the stairs two at a time.

Bursting past an astonished servant, he was just in season to see the coat tails of his friend Major Pontifex disappearing through the door, which was violently slammed in his face.

Joe Barkley jerked the door open with lightning quickness.

Quick as was his action, however, Major Pontifex and the long-bearded Virginian had already gained the sidewalk, and followed by the third man, had started on a run for the hack.

"Stop there or I'll fire!" cried the detective, springing after them.

The bearded Virginian was the only one of the trio who seemed to heed these words.



With surprising quickness he faced about and discharged two shots from his revolver in rapid succession.

Then, springing after Major Pontifex and his companion, all three leaped into the hack, which wheeled around into Rutgers street, the noise of its wheels upon the uneven pavement awaking the echoes of the night.

And Joe Barkley?

The young Secret Service detective made no effort to stay them.

He was powerless to do so.

Joe Barkley lay sprawling face downward upon the pavement as lies one dead.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### SEEN FROM THE WINDOW

"Bress yo' chile, yo' looks like a lamb about to be led to de slaughter—'deed yo' do. Thank de Lor' your poor mudder is in her grabe—an' she was old Nance's nuss chile as well as yo'—'fore she'd eber libed to see dis day!"

And Aunt Nancy the old black housekeeper at Ballentyne Hall, stood off a pace and gazed with no little satisfaction, in spite of the intensity of her feelings, at Katherine Livingston, who appeared before her dressed in wedding garments, fresh from the final touches of the old woman's hands.

What now?

Has Katherine Livingston, after repeated refusals, consented to become the bride of her much hated cousin, Arthur Heming?

Has that gentleman, who displayed such chivalry upon a previous occasion, consented to take his fair cousin to wife against her will?

The last question may be answered in the affirmative, the first most decidedly in the negative.

Days have elapsed since the early morning hour when we left our heroine face to face with her drunken step-father in the room behind the parlor, which had been the scene of Joe Barkley's ghostly experiences, and during the entire period Katherine Livingston has remained a prisoner in one of the upper rooms of the gray house on the rock.

When General Livingston had stated that Heming and his companions had gone to fetch the parson, that Katherine might be forced into an immediate marriage with her cousin, he believed that he spoke only the truth.

They had gone on just this errand, riding twenty miles back into the country with the intention of engaging the services of a disreputable, drunken fellow who had once been a clergyman, but long ago relieved of his charge, knowing him to be a man upon whom they could depend to carry out their will in spite of any resistance made by the bride.

Unfortunately for the plans of these schemers, when Heming and his companions had arrived at their destination they found that "the parson"—such was the name he went by—had been shot dead the night before in a drunken brawl.

Here was an unlooked for obstacle.

In order to obtain the estate of his dead uncle it would be absolutely necessary for Arthur Heming to produce a regular marriage certificate, testifying to his union with his cousin, before the surrogate of the city of New York.

There was not a particle of sentiment about Arthur Heming.

He had no love for Katherine Livingston, but he had a decided love for his uncle's estate.

The money promised to aid the scheme of the Confederate government to burn New York City was but a mere bagatelle as compared with the whole, and this was to be returned to him with interest in case of the success of the now lost cause.

Thoroughly in sympathy with the South, Arthur Heming had lent himself to the scheme—it was the suggestion of General Livingston—heart and soul.

There had been some delay in the plans of the plotters.

It was deemed necessary to gain the consent of the Confederate government before proceeding.

This they expected to receive through Major Pontifex—though none of them knew by whose hand it would come—and word having been received from Richmond the very night of Joe Barkley's arrival at the Hall that this was granted, the dumb negro Pete was dispatched accordingly to communicate with one of their number—a man named Jennings—who had been obliged to start for New York on the train leaving Dugdale station shortly after the arrival of the night express from Washington, which had numbered among its passengers the young Secret Service detective, Colonel Walsingham and his charge.

The outcome of this dispatch has already been explained.

It is with subsequent events at the gray house on the rock, as affecting Katherine Livingston, that we now have to deal.

So far as Katherine herself was concerned, these events have been very few.

She has seen no one save her step-father and Aunt Nancy during the days which followed, being confined closely in her room, the door of which was for the most part guarded by the taciturn Mr. Kinnicutt, the custodian of the Hall.

To his step-daughter General Livingston had stated his plans freely.

The failing cause of the South needed money. Her marriage with Arthur Heming would bring it.

Aware of Katherine's Union sentiments and the hatred of her cousin, he had resorted to artifice to entice her within his power, and whether with her consent or without it he sternly declared that the marriage must take place at an early day.

Tears, prayers and appeals to the man's better nature were alike useless.

All they needed was a clergyman willing to perform the ceremony under the peculiar circumstances.

Now such a person had been found and Katherine had been ordered to prepare for the marriage without delay.

There had been much excitement in and about the gray house on the rock all day.



Mounted men had been coming and going.

It had begun in the early morning with the arrival of three persons, which had been followed by loud reports in the rooms below.

For Katherine Livingston it had been a day of agony.

Beside the horror of the approaching ceremony her heart burned to know the fate of the great northern city which had so long been her home.

Had New York been laid to ashes? Had her own efforts to avert that calamity proved a success or failure?

The brave girl had as little means of knowing these things as though inclosed in a tomb.

The words spoken by Aunt Nancy had scarcely fallen from her lips when a key was heard to enter the lock, the door was flung back, and Arthur Heming accompanied by General Livingston entered the room.

"Go out, yous! Ain't you ashamed to enter a lady's apartment without knocking?" exclaimed the old negress. "Mass Livingston, I blush fo' you, I do."

The face of the officer colored slightly.

"Nance, I'll have you whipped for your impudence if you ain't careful. Leave the room, you old hag. Arthur and I want to talk with you, Kate."

The old nurse departed grumblingly.

Meanwhile Katherine, who had taken her station at the window overlooking the mountain road leading up to the Hall, neither turned her head nor answered a word.

"Talk to her, Arthur," whispered General Livingston, flinging himself into a chair. "Try and coax her; do anything, promise anything, so that we avoid a scene."

But Mr. Arthur Heming's powers of persuasion proved unequal to the occasion.

To all his flattering speeches and promises of that life of enjoyment which wealth alone can bring the girl refused to answer a word.

She stood like a statue gazing at the wooded tops of the Blue Ridge, now radiant in the winter sunset, neither speaking nor seeming to hear.

"I can't do anything with her!" exclaimed Heming, turning away in disgust. "Try your hand, uncle. As you say, the marriage must come off to-night, if we have to take her into the presence of the parson by force."

General Livingston was about to reply when a low, involuntary exclamation of terror was heard to escape his daughter's lips.

She drew back from the window suddenly, and with a marked change of manner announced herself willing to hear anything they might have to say.

"What ails you, Kate?" demanded the general, suspiciously.

"What ails me? Can you ask? You are my natural protector——"

"No, no! I don't mean that. What made you start and exclaim?"

And without waiting for the answer General Livingston strode toward the window and saw——

Joe Barkley, the young Secret Service detective, mounted on

a Virginia mule, toiling slowly up the steep ascent to the gray house on the rock.

## CHAPTER XIX.

CAPTAIN COGAN'S CALLERS—SECOND VISIT OF JOE BARKLEY.

"Right shoulder, shift arms!"

A hundred gleaming muskets rise simultaneously to the shoulders of as many men.

"Present arms!"

The muskets drop from the shoulder, the bayonets forming a glittering row before the line of men.

"Ground arms! Shoulder arms! Break ranks! March!"

In quick succession the several orders were given, and as the men of Company Q, 239th N. Y. Volunteers disperse themselves about the camp at the close of the afternoon drill, Captain Cogan, the officer in charge of that particular section of the Union lines which flanks Dugdale creek, lights a cigar and sallies toward the tent of his friend the first lieutenant, prepared to resume an interrupted game of cards.

It was the military camp whose fires had been seen from the heights by the unfortunate Colonel Walsingham on the night of the struggle between that officer and the dumb negro driver which had cost both their lives.

For weeks upon weeks Captain Cogan had been stationed with his company in that lonely spot, and it is needless to say that time hung heavily upon the hands of every member of Company Q, as well as upon those of the captain himself.

That is why the sudden appearance of a young mounted officer on this particular afternoon, a few moments subsequent to the close of the drill, threw the whole camp into a state of excitement.

Were they to be ordered to the front?

Of course the members of Company Q, on seeing the officer come tearing down the mountainside into the camp, at once set him down as a special messenger from the regimental colonel, whose station was some ten miles away.

The members of Company Q, 239th N. Y. Volunteers were all mistaken.

The young man who had thus suddenly appeared in their midst was none other than Secret Service Detective Joe Barkley.

Hurrying to the tent of Captain Cogan, and thence, by direction, to that of the lieutenant, entering it just as the officers, warned by an orderly, had concealed cards and stakes under a drum which had served as a table, he saluted the officer and demanded a private interview without delay.

It had come to be a saying among Joe Barkley's brother detectives that he had as many lives as a cat.

On numerous occasions he had narrowly escaped death.

On the particular occasion mentioned in a recent chapter, when we left Joe lying as one dead upon the pavement in



East Broadway, he had met with no worse accident than being struck on the forehead by a spent pistol ball.

The intention of the long-bearded Virginian had been to kill Joe Barkley.

Fortunately—most fortunately—the distance between them was a little too great.

An inch less and we should have a dead detective on our hands at this important point of our narrative.

As it happened, Joe was only stunned.

It was the beginning of the end of the mysterious affair.

The wheels of the hack containing Major Pontifex and his rescuers had scarcely passed out of hearing before friendly hands touched the prostrate form of the young detective.

It was owing to what followed that we now find our hero, three days later, in Captain Cogan's tent on the banks of Dugdale creek.

The men of Company Q gathered about in groups, waiting.

Their curiosity was destined to remain unsatisfied for some hours to come.

Within ten minutes Captain Cogan suddenly appeared and gave orders for a squad of twenty men to make ready to accompany him back among the hills.

When the squad left the camp Captain Cogan marched at their head on foot with the young officer who had so suddenly come upon them by his side.

Of their destination nothing was known.

The members of Company Q left behind were obliged to satisfy their curiosity as best they could.

Meanwhile the squad continued along Dugdale creek, following the same road taken by Katherine Livingston on the night of her arrival at the gray house on the rock.

Joe Barkley and Captain Cogan conversed in low tones as they continued to advance.

"You are sure your guide won't fail you?" asked the captain, as they came in sight of a small church of red sandstone standing alone in the midst of an ancient looking burial ground at some distance ahead.

"I have every confidence in him, captain."

"But you don't know these Virginia niggers as well as I do, Mr. Barkley. They are not to be trusted, sir, I assure you that."

"I have every confidence in him, captain."

"I'll trust this one."

"I think you are making a mistake."

"I don't agree with you."

"This is a very grave matter. Would it not be better for us to march directly to Ballentyne Hall?"

"And find it deserted on our arrival? I don't think so, captain. There's no telling how many spies they have out. Remember I have a double purpose to accomplish. Remember the honor of a lady is at stake."

"I do not forget that you are, too, bearer of pre-emptory orders from President Lincoln, Mr. Barkley; and I am entirely at your service—I can only advise."

Here the conversation ceased, the stillness being broken only by the tramp of the soldiers along the stony road.

The sun had sunk low in the west when the squad com-

manded by Captain Cogan halted before the old red church. Almost on the instant the door was seen to open and a young negro appeared, peering out with a cautious air.

His eyes lit up with pleasure at the sight of Joe Barkley.

He spoke no word, but running toward him, attempted to kiss his hand.

The detective pushed him aside gently.

Then he pointed toward the soldiers, made a motion indicating haste, and waved his hand off in the direction of the surrounding hills.

The boy seemed to comprehend him.

Throwing the church door wide open, he motioned to Captain Cogan to follow him inside.

"Follow him," said Joe Barkley. "He understands himself perfectly. I have been over the ground with him only this morning, and know of what I speak."

The order was given.

Through the trapdoor beneath the pulpit of the old red church, down the steps and through the cave Captain Cogan and his men followed.

When they emerged into the open air again they were in the forest within easy reach of the gray house on the rock.

"I shall now leave you, captain," said Joe Barkley, "and proceed alone to Ballentyne Hall. Pete, the dummy, will guide you, and you must have your men in readiness to spring from the pines which surround the house at the sound of my whistle. They are a desperate lot, and may take it into their heads to do desperate deeds when they find themselves foiled. For this no time must be allowed them. I have sworn to rescue that girl, and I mean to do it. Everything depends upon your prompt action—you understand?"

"Perfectly, my dear sir. You will find my men ready. Still I disapprove of your methods. I consider you are taking your life in your hands."

To this no reply was made.

Instead Joe Barkley simply walked toward a mule which was to be seen tied to a tree a short distance away, and mounting, waved his hand to Captain Cogan and rode off up the steep ascent.

Such were the circumstances attending Joe Barkley's second visit to the gray house on the rock.

The sure-footed mule mastered the ascent without difficulty, and a few moments from the time of leaving Captain Cogan the young Secret Service detective rode up to the porch of Ballentyne Hall.

There stood the gray house, grim and silent.

As the last rays of the setting sun fell upon it it seemed hard to believe that any living person could be concealed behind its walls.

"Can they have received warning?" thought the detective.

"Can it be possible that the dummy has deceived me after all, and that I am simply being drawn into a trap?"

He halloed three times with all the strength of his lungs, but received no response.

Not even his old acquaintance, the cornercracker, appeared.

Joe Barkley now dismounted, turning the mule loose to go where he would.



Then stepping to the door he knocked loudly several times in succession, but all in and about the house remained as silent as the grave.

A trial of the latch proved the door to be open, and Joe entered the well-remembered hall.

It was cold and desolate. There was no evidence of any one having crossed the threshold since he had left the week before.

A trial of the various doors found them in precisely their former condition—some open, others locked.

It was already very dark in the hall, and darker in the great parlor, the scene of his former ghostly experiences, into which Joe Barkley entered now.

He had scarcely advanced three feet into the room when the door behind him suddenly closed with a loud slam.

It left Joe in total darkness.

It sent his heart to this throat from the sudden overpowering sense of fear which often assails the bravest men.

What had closed it?"

True, he had left the outer door open, but there was absolutely no wind stirring.

Joe Barkley was about to spring toward the door with the intention of wrenching it open, when there suddenly fell upon his ear the same wild strains of music which he remembered so well.

As though riveted to the floor, the young detective paused and listened.

The music was evidently that of a violin played with a masterly hand.

Suddenly the experiences of his previous visit began to repeat themselves.

At the end of the room occupied by the Gothic paneling feet appeared moving back and forth, then the bodies of a man and woman, finally the shoulders, last the heads.

There were only two persons now.

They were dressed in the same quaint costumes of the last century, slowly and sedately going through the figures of the minuet.

Joe Barkley, standing alone in the darkness of the great room, could see all this with startling plainness.

For the third time he found himself face to face with the ghosts of Ballentyne Hall.

## CHAPTER XX.

### WHAT THE KEYHOLE REVEALED.

The sounds of the weird music continued to float through the great hall of the gray house on the rock, the steps of the dancers still moved to and fro.

All this Joe Barkley saw and heard, yet, somehow, the longer he looked and listened the less the strange demonstrations seemed to partake of the supernatural, the more of the real.

"They have baited their trap with the same dainty morsel

they used before," thought the detective. "Courage, my friend! This mummary display must not terrify you. There is work for you to accomplish in this strange old mansion which will admit of no delay."

Thus reassuring himself, Joe Barkley crept toward the Gothic paneling against which the forms of the dancers were thrown.

As he did this he felt a breath of cold air across his face—saw, or thought he saw—two great doors close over the figures of the dancers, who disappeared as suddenly as the music ceased.

This time Joe Barkley had come prepared.

With surprising quickness he produced a dark lantern from under his cloak and directed its rays upon the Gothic paneling at the end of the room.

Now he beheld what he had not previously observed, namely, that the panels were divided in the center by a narrow crack, extending from their carved tops above down to the floor below.

"Come, I saw these things shut. Let's see how they open," muttered the detective.

Reaching upward, he grasped a protruding knob of the Gothic ornamentation and pulled with all his strength.

But, as it proved, no such exertion was required.

So easily did the great panels move outward on their well-oiled hinges that Joe Barkley nearly fell backward to the floor.

Behind a large mirror stood revealed by the light of the lantern reflecting back the objects of the room.

For one instant Joe Barkley stared at his own reflection in the mirror blankly.

Then, turning with a bound, ran the length of the apartment.

At the other end was a pair of folding doors.

These were found to be fastened, with no key in the lock.

Joe closed the slide of his lantern and stood listening breathlessly.

For a few moments all was as still as death.

Then came the faint murmur of voices.

It was possible to distinguish what was said, and the sounds were not repeated.

Instead stealthy footsteps were heard crossing the floor of the apartment behind the doors.

"I begin to see into this," muttered the young man, as he groped his way to the door by which he had entered. "The fiddling and dancing took place in that room, from the open doors of which its reflection was thrown on the covered mirror. Had I but turned, but no matter. Some of these locked doors have got to open, or I'll know the reason why."

He had passed into the hall now.

It was as deserted as when he had left it.

Moving noiselessly, Joe crept along the passage to the locked door on the left.

Now, to his surprise, he saw that a narrow beam of light was projected through its keyhole.

Stooping, Joe Barkley applied his eyes to the orifice.



He could see the interior of the apartment plainly, and the sight which he beheld thrilled every fiber in his frame.

First there was the woman and the man whose ghostly forms he had seen reflected in the great mirror behind the Gothic panels in the room beyond.

The woman was in the act of removing an ancient looking, flowered petticoat, which action revealed a pair of fashionable trousers beneath.

There were several other persons in the room, among them the gray-bearded Virginian who had attempted the detective's life in New York, the younger card player of the Ann street saloon.

Beside these stood Joe's friend, Major Pontifex, and a sour, disagreeable looking person in ministerial garb.

But all this was nothing.

Even as Joe Barkley looked the door opened and there appeared an old man in military dress, who dragged, rather than led, the fainting form of the same beautiful girl who had appeared to our hero in his dreams in the chamber above.

"Quick! Quick, Heming! Get yourself ready," the detective heard the old man whisper, evidently directing his speech to the dancer in female garb. "The marriage must take place instantly. No doubt you have scared the life out of that meddlesome intruder by this time. Leave me to deal with him when the thing is done."

With stealthy, cat-like motion, Joe Barkley rose to his feet.

He had scarce time to turn when he beheld the redoubtable Mr. Kinnicutt entering the door at the end of the hall.

It was a critical moment, but Joe was prepared.

Springing toward the corner, with one hand he thrust a cocked revolver in his face while the other pressed to his lips a whistle on which he blew shrilly, awaking the echoes of the ancient hall.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### AN INTERRUPTED MARRIAGE CEREMONY.—THE END.

General Livingston, as he looked from the window of his step-daughter's apartment at Ballentyne Hall, saw in Joe Barkley, toiling up the hill on muleback, no worse enemy than the young officer who had through mistake sought shelter at the gray house on the rock the night of the storm.

Of the doings of Katherine that night he knew nothing, suspected nothing.

Ballentyne Hall, situated as it was within the Union lines, was constantly subject to the possibility of visitors whose sympathies were not with the cause to which the general had given himself up body and soul.

This the man understood fully.

Not only understood, but was fully prepared to entertain such visitors when they came.

Of the nature of his reception to those who have followed

Joe Barkley's experiences in the gray house on the rock nothing further need be said.

"It's that Union officer again!" breathed General Livingston, drawing back from the window. "Kate, on the peril of your life, don't you dare to attract his attention. What can have brought him back here? I thought we gave him a warm enough reception before, eh, Arthur? This time he won't get off so easy. Quick! We must start up the ghostly farce again!"

He had moved a step or two toward the door, when a word from Arthur Heming served to stay him.

"Uncle!" he whispered, "I don't like this intrusion; something tells me it bodes anything but good for us. I can dress myself in my grandmother's clothes, and with the help of your arrangements of curtains and mirrors do my part as well as ever; but this marriage—it must not be delayed."

"It shan't be. Arthur, you are right. Hurry downstairs and try to scare the fellow off if possible. Tom Carver is on hand, thank goodness, and with his fiddle can do the musical. Probably young Jennings will go partners with you in the minuet."

"But suppose we fail to frighten this fellow. He didn't seem to scare very badly the other night."

"You won't fail if you manage the affair right. Only keep him busy until I can bring this stubborn girl to her senses. Once that is done I'll send Kinnicutt to take charge of him and keep him engaged while we slip out the west wing door and gain the entrance to the cave."

"Then what?"

"Then, suitably disguised, you and Kate must start for New York. If Major Pontifex is to be believed, and the strange story he told on his arrival this morning is true, our affairs there need looking after sadly."

"Faith, and I would rather some one else had the job, if the Secret Service detective is after us," muttered Heming. "By the way, has anything been seen of Pete, the dummy?"

"Nothing."

"I don't like that. That boy is not such a fool as you take him for—mark what I say!"

He was gone on the instant, leaving Katherine Livingston, pale and trembling with excitement, to face her step-father alone.

Upon the scene which followed we must draw the curtain.

We cannot expose the tears, the pitiful entreaties, the prayers of the unfortunate girl to the public gaze.

Sufficient to relate that upon the stony heart of her step-father they had no effect; and but a short time elapsed ere Katherine, in spite of her feeble efforts at resistance, was dragged downstairs, followed by the weeping Nance, into the presence of the plotters, as Joe Barkley had seen.

Now the west wing of the gray house on the rock had been practically cut off from the rest of the mansion.

So effectual had the locked doors proved on former occasions that General Livingston, as he entered the room, scarcely gave the intruding officer a thought.

The sight of Arthur Heming removing the female garments in which he had masqueraded called him to his mind, how-



ever, and he gave utterance to the impatient speech which Joe Barkley, with his ear at the keyhole, had overheard.

"The marriage! The marriage!" he exclaimed, in the same hurried whisper. "Parson, get your book ready. Arthur, take your place. We need fear no intrusion here, and——"

A whistle, loud and shrill, now broke upon their ears.

The sound was followed by a scuffling in the hall without. Then several pistol shots, succeeding each other quickly, were also heard, and before any of those in the room could speak or move, blow after blow was rained upon the door connecting with the hall.

"Great heavens! What can it mean?" breathed General Livingston, his face fairly ashen in its grayness. "Take your cousin and retreat to the secret vaults below the cellar, Arthur. Gentlemen, you had best follow, while I——"

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The door flew suddenly open, torn from its hinges by the united pressure of the bodies of several men, and into the very midst of those gathered behind it dashed Joe Barkley and Captain Cogan with cocked revolvers in their hands.

"Hands up, gentlemen!" exclaimed the former, as their entrance was followed by a dozen armed soldiers. "Young lady, from this moment you are under my protection. Captain Cogan, there are your prisoners. They are the scoundrels who would have destroyed the city of New York."

And as Joe Barkley threw his strong arms about the fainting form of Katherine Livingston the plotters of the gray house on the rock slowly and mutteringly raised their hands.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Bress de Lor'—bress de Lor'! It was my boy Pete what done it!" exclaimed old Aunt Nance, as, half an hour later, the forms of General Livingston, Arthur Heming, Major Pontifex, the men Jennings and Carver, with the remaining plotters, disappeared, marching between a double line of soldiers down the steep incline which led to the gray house on the rock.

Aunt Nancy was right.

It was all the work of Pete, the dummy, instructed in his duties by the old woman herself.

Little did General Livingston and his fellow plotters dream, when they freely discussed their plans before the old negress, of the shrewd, calculating brain at work to circumvent their designs, which was concealed within that old black head.

Nor was Joe Barkley, as he stood between the old woman and Katherine Livingston, while Pete turned somersaults in front of the porch, at the time much better informed.

All he then knew was that when he recovered consciousness after the stunning effects of the spent ball on the pavement in East Broadway that night he had found Pete the dummy at his side.

It need not be related how the boy made him understand by signs the friendliness of his intentions.

How next day, aided by one accustomed to converse with the dumb, Lieutenant Marsden and Joe drew from Pete his version of the until then mysterious plot.

What they learned at that time was of the highest importance, for it told them that Major Pontifex and his companions in the hack had probably started for Virginia on the morning train.

It was too late to try to stop them, but Joe Barkley's plans were instantly formed.

Pete could communicate no names, of course, but he described the man accurately.

He also made the young detective understand the danger to which Katherine Livingston was exposed at Ballentyne Hall, offering to return in Joe's charge and guide him to the hall in the manner in which he afterward did.

Of course that which the dumb negro had done his best to communicate was better understood after all was over than at the time it was told.

One thing Joe Barkley could never understand was why Pete had persisted in delivering the blank dispatch; why he had not put himself under his protection when he had first met him on the train.

The sudden appearance of Pete at the window of the Hester street saloon was plainer, for the negro had no difficulty in communicating to Joe how, while in company with the Virginians, he had seen him next morning walking down Broadway.

From that moment they had never lost sight of Joe Barkley, keeping the lad with them until after the shooting, when, seeing it was his last chance to carry out the orders given him by his mother, Pete had leaped from the hack and managed to make his escape.

On searching Major Pontifex's carpetbag in the East Broadway boarding house an infernal machine of peculiar construction was found.

A hundred similar machines were subsequently found in the cellar beneath Ballentyne Hall, and from certain documents taken from the person of General Livingston and Major Pontifex it was discovered that the intention had been to place one of them in each of New York's principal hotels, in each public building, on various ships in the harbor and other prominent places, so arranged that all would explode at nearly the same time.

Whether the plot would have succeeded or not it is hard to say.

There was no doubt that the Confederate authorities were at the bottom of it. They had tried it once before, and had not Joe Barkley interfered would unquestionably have tried it again.

During the search at Ballentyne Hall which followed the ghostly mysteries of that ancient mansion were fully explained.

Curtains and mirrors, old clothes, dark lanterns and a skillful violinist had been the agents employed.

The arrangement had been the handiwork of General Livingston, gotten up for the express purpose of scaring off intruders.

Even Aunt Nancy was not wholly in the secret, and when questioned was unable to explain the sudden appearance of the figures in the windows, further than to say that she knew



them to have been her master and his friends, and had herself ransacked sundry old chests in the attic to procure for them female disguises.

Katherine Livingston's acquaintance with the secret entrance to the blue room had been derived from her mother; and Joe Barkley has had abundant time since the night of the his memorable vision to listen to its explanation, as will be presently seen.

General Livingston and his companions were conveyed to Washington by Captain Cogan and confined in the Old Capitol prison.

It was supposed that many of the Virginians in the neighborhood were concerned in the plot, but this was never certainly known.

Possibly the corncracker, Mr. Kinnicutt, could have told had he lived, but unfortunately that individual had gone too far in attempting to interfere with Joe Barkley.

He had fired on the detective almost immediately after the whistle was blown.

The ball went wide of its mark.

Not so a shot from the revolver of Captain Cogan, who at that moment appeared on the scene.

This shot, better aimed, did its fatal work, and when the plotters of Ballentyne Hall were hurried away they left the dead body of Thomas Kinnicutt behind.

How it might have fared with General Livingston and his associates had the war continued it is difficult to tell.

Fortunately for these rascals, its termination was already near, and before the time set for their trial arrived the end had come.

In the general amnesty to which followed these men were pardoned after a long imprisonment, thus escaping death, which they richly deserved.

Long after these events, three years and over—certain hunters who were climbing the wooded sides of the precipice which rises above Dugdale creek came across two skeletons, one of a man, the other of a boy.

They were never identified, but Katherine Livingston to this day believes them to have been all that remained of Colonel Walsingham and the dumb driver—Pete's brother, as it afterward turned out—who had fallen from the wagon on the ever memorable night of the storm.

The secret passage beneath the pulpit of the old red church in the valley remains undisturbed.

It was constructed in colonial times to afford the worshippers a means of retreat in case of attack by the Indians.

It is pointed out to tourists and strange stories told of how it served the purpose of masked midnight raiders in the days of the great civil war.

Of course Katherine Livingston never inherited her uncle's estates.

These went to found an asylum within a year.

After her rescue by Joe Barkley, Katherine, taking Aunt Nancy and Pete with her, had returned under the detective's protection to her relatives in New York.

There she had the satisfaction of seeing her escort some weeks later promoted to the charge of the United States

Secret Service in the North, and of reading a warm letter of commendation for his valuable services in the matter of the plot to burn the city, written by President Lincoln's own hand.

What Katherine Livingston did get, however, was a husband.

His name was Joseph Barkley.

If any one doubts the truth of this heroic tale let them question its two principal actors.

They can be found living in a mansion at Dugdale, Rockbridge county, Virginia.

Ballentyne Hall is the name by which it is known.

To our readers it is familiar as The Gray House on the Rock.

THE END.

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